

BEYOND KNOWLEDGE:
A READING OF DAMBUDZO MARECHERA

A THESIS
SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE
OF
MASTER OF ARTS IN ENGLISH
IN THE
UNIVERSITY OF CANTERBURY
by
Creon Upton

University of Canterbury
1996

PR
9850.9
.M323
.Z6
.U71
1996

Abstract

By concentrating on his prose works, this thesis explores Dambudzo Marechera's rendering of the decentred self and his examining of this in terms of both its relationship with society, and its impact on metaphysical thought, particularly anarchist idealism.

Colin Style, in his essay "The White man in Black Zimbabwean Literature," claims parenthetically, in reference to Marechera's attitude towards Europeans, that "[t]o be fair, as a total iconoclast, he is rampantly anti-everything." This thesis both agrees and disagrees with Style's comment. In terms of Marechera's hostility towards even the most subtle human organisation Style is correct; Marechera claimed that the act of organising always reminded him "of jail" and this thesis examines this in terms of his portrayal of such organising on international, national, domestic, revolutionary and fantastical levels. It must be noted that these levels take on greater significance in Marechera's literature as they become increasingly microcosmic or increasingly radical; and they are dealt with accordingly here.

However, despite his vituperative attitude towards people when he perceived them as adopting a rôle, Marechera empathised with all of his species in terms of having an impure, unknowable psyche which of necessity clings to partial truths, adopting them as fundamental. This thesis investigates Marechera's evocation of this psyche, in all its irreconcilable elusiveness, and examines his efforts to represent this unknown as a commonality which defines equality.

A distinctly Marecherean use of the doppelganger aids this investigation as it travels from concept to concept following various masks as they glide from character to character within and through Marechera's works. This brings into play both Marechera's subtext of a decentred consciousness and the avenues (characters) through which to examine the above ideas in detail.

Reference is made throughout to select literature which in various ways augments or elucidates this reading of Marechera, and generically European philosophy is called upon sparingly to support this interpretation of his words.

Acknowledgements

I thank

- My department for considerable financial assistance and a great deal of stimulation
- My university for the same
- The Dambudzo Marechera Trust members for their guidance and advice; and I honour them for their work
- My supervisors:
Peter Murray for his enthusiasm, sensitivity and insight, and for insisting indefatigably, despite my own tireless efforts to thwart him, upon doing his job;
Anna Smith from whose erudition and commitment it is an honour to benefit
- My family for being, with appropriate irony, supportive and encouraging
- My friends for being.

Contents

Acknowledgements	i
1 Introduction	1
2 The Web Of Self	5
3 Victims of a Myth	41
4 A Nightmare of Ideas	63
5 What Available Reality?	81
6 Conclusion	101
Works Cited	105

Iconoclasm by itself may embody a social vision.

Wole Soyinka

(Myth, Literature and the African World)

If only people would stop trying to be things! What can they be, after all, beyond what they already are—or would be if I believed they were anything.

Mervyn Peake

(Gormenghast)

We are faced then with a mimicry imitating nothing; faced, so to speak, with a double that doubles no simple, a double that nothing anticipates, nothing at least that is not itself already double.

Jacques Derrida

(The Double Session)

I knew very well that it was ninety-one, but against all logic I decided on ninety-seven, just to oppose this man, this man who makes it his business to be in the right.

Knut Hamsun

(Mysteries)

We have become ruthless enough to judge while cynically knowing that judgement is useless, beside the point. The judge and the accused know that both of them are guilty and the trial a farce.

Dambudzo Marechera

(The African Writer's Experience of European Literature)

We've got to be slightly fascist.

Bruce Ross

(in conversation)

Chapter 1

Introduction

I shall attempt, in this exploration. . . .

Wilson Harris
(*The Womb of Space*)

The art of Dambudzo Marechera represents struggle; the struggle to express the inexpressible, to communicate the incommunicable, and to convey coherently the necessary incoherence of perceived existence. This is of course a truism of all art, but its significance to Marechera is exemplary in that the very knowledge of the struggle, its inherent futility (in terms of ever ‘mastering’ the medium unequivocally), and yet its value and necessity, are ‘facts’ of which the author is perpetually, almost cripplingly, aware and which indeed often represent the very contradictions or paradoxes which it is his (self appointed) task to reconcile.

Indeed, a seemingly valid criticism of Marechera could point to his obsession with ‘the role of the artist’ and ‘the problematics of art’, advocating a stoic response to these crises which accepts their irrefutability but goes on nevertheless to produce literature in a ‘normal’ and ‘readable’ vein—a ‘put up or shut up’ attitude, intolerant of self-indulgent artistic sensibilities. It is one of the hidden agendas of this thesis, however, to refute this criticism by illustrating that not only are all of Marechera’s works artistically viable, but that much of their strength derives from the author’s ruthless examination of the nuances, traps, limitations and potentialities of his medium.

My investigation into Marechera’s *œuvre* will examine his attitude towards the individual, as that individual relates to their society, culture and environment. In

broad terms Marechera can be described as an extreme individualist, and in his life and his dealings with society this is certainly the case. However, his intellectualism forbade Marechera from fundamentalising, in literature, the individual, recognising the mutability and indefinability of a given subject who will never conform to a monological, unified literary encasement. Marechera's individualism, then, can be seen as a principle or an ideology which refers to the individual as a *concept* rather than as a specific entity (the concept of a Dambudzo Marechera being a Marechera existing at any given hypothetical moment, not constrained by the Marechera of any other moment). The challenge in his literature, then, was for Marechera to allow his subjects the same freedom to be, beyond the constraints of his own authorial dictatorship. In addition to this, Marechera recognises, one must confront the extremities of perspective which lie between individuals, each extreme as valid (from the appropriate subjective viewpoint) as any other and each not only worthy of an intellectual, liberal respect, but each demanding (and this is in essence the ubiquitous artistic challenge) a validating elucidation of that viewpoint. In this respect Marechera seeks not only to recognise, along with Chris in *Black Sunlight*, "the other side of the question" but to actually render this other side, or *any* other side, the question being not manichean but in fact infinitely multifarious.

The thread I intend to follow in my delving into Marechera's fiction is that of the doppelganger or double which in these works operates in various ways to undermine the concept of the unified individual, and to provide an insight into the wider implications or possibilities which lie within or through this decentred subject. Despite the psychoanalytic implications of the doppelganger motif, and the potential it suggests for particularly Jungian-based treatment along these lines, my intention is not to subject Marechera to such treatment (although an investigation of this sort would I am sure prove fruitful), but rather to explore Marechera's social investigations of character, relationships, identity and society as these are rendered through paradigms of order and disorder, represented by masks characters wear and share, either overtly as in the case of the explicit doppelganger, or covertly as in the case of the implicit doppelganger. I will look at these masks of identity in terms of Wilson Harris's idea of "carnival twinships" which feeds upon the concept of 'paradigms of order' but which ultimately explodes this hubris of totality through its own axioms of mutability. Marechera, I will suggest, does the same.

This thread necessarily weaves into and out of each of Marechera's individual texts, as each mask exists not only between characters in a single work but resides in various guises within each text, thus questioning constantly the autonomy of the single work (or even the body of works) and demanding, as also for instance do the works of Kurt Vonnegut, perpetual mental revisiting between the texts of this decentred, non-linear body of works. I will not be so bold then as to attempt to construct this thesis chronologically, following Marechera's 'development' from *The House Of Hunger* through to *Scrapiron Blues*, but rather I shall construct my own process of elucidation which will I think lead us through Marechera's mental systemisation of the challenges and reconciliations which confront and are confronted by the individual in both literature and life. Ironically, however, in terms of emphasis, this process will to some degree follow the chronology of Marechera's output, particularly in chapters two and three which will concentrate primarily upon *Black Sunlight*, with specific reference to *The Black Insider*.

In my first chapter I will investigate Marechera's use of the doppelganger generally and seek to articulate and exemplify its significance to his literature. This will lay the groundwork and provide the basis for the more complex analysis which will follow, and will introduce us to the concept of the decentred self which is integral to Marechera's work. We will also, in this chapter, come across characters who articulate the fundamentals of the basic existentialist dilemma we are discussing; that of the individual's relationship with his or her self, and how this is reconciled with their relationship with society. In the second chapter I will look more closely at a select group of mask-sharers existing in Marechera's literature who represent symbols of power and authority, existing throughout all strata of society, who either actively oppress the individual or at least live out the delusion of their own indestructibility; both as holders of sanctified power and as unified individuals. In this context we will be exposed to Marechera's indictment of all individuals in society, noting that he implicates any given subject not so much by how they act but by the fact of their humanity. From here, in my third chapter, I wish to look at 'the other side of the question', where Marechera evokes resistance to this tradition of authority and places the individual within a context of anarchic freedom. But the spirit of this resistance, we shall see, is easily perverted, by the same 'fact of humanity', into another mask of totality; the hegemonic mask of resistance. In the fourth and final

chapter of this thesis my intention is to bring together Marechera's 'ideal' existence (which is, we will find, unattainable) and his attitude towards representing this in his literature. What I will be concentrating upon will be the degree to which Marechera is able to comfortably present a view of humanity which is compassionate towards its subject, which convincingly renders multifarious viewpoints, and which reminds the reader unobtrusively of the dangers of an absolute faith in the narrative voice.

Throughout this thesis also I intend to draw from other literature in an attempt to suggest the further possibilities of my attitude towards the doppelganger. Marechera made no bones of his debt to the literary tradition and he acknowledges it explicitly in his lecture "The African Writer's Experience Of European Literature"; it also pervades his fiction. Drawing from both these references of Marechera's and from my own experience I shall seek to follow the thread of masks of identity which we find in Marechera's fiction, through to other fictions where characters await who may elucidate for us yet other perspectives, other sides of the question. The intention then is to inform ourselves further of the paths of human perception which Marechera reveals and to appreciate the degrees to which Marechera informs these paths.

My emphasis throughout shall be upon Marechera's prose works; however I shall refer to both his drama and poetry where this seems prudent.

Chapter 2

The Web Of Self

nature ... has further complicated her task and added to our confusion by providing not only a perfect rag-bag of odds and ends within us ... but has contrived that the whole assortment shall be lightly stiched together by a single thread. Memory is the seamstress, and a capricious one at that. Memory runs her needle in and out, up and down, hither and thither. We know not what comes next, or what follows after.

Virginia Woolf
(*Orlando*)

*And the things you can't remember
Tell the things you can't forget that
History puts a saint in every dream*

Tom Waits
(*Time*)

It is illuminating to begin this investigation through the avenues opened by one of Marechera's early short stories, the first of the three narratives which make up "The Writer's Grain." (Marechera, 1978. 100–133) This story, frenetic, disturbing and wickedly funny, exists in curious, even incestuous, relationship with another story which comes later in *The House of Hunger*, "Thought-tracks in the Snow," (142–148) and also recalls Dostoyevsky's early work *The Double*.

Like Mr Golyadkin of *The Double*, the narrator of "The Writer's Grain," a not altogether likable but certainly pitiable character, meets his doppelganger who proceeds to usurp him from what he believes to be his rightful position, and who

performs in that position with far greater acumen than the original could ever have achieved. In contrast to the themes of the doppelganger tradition, then, in these stories the double figure, far from representing the evil twin, embodies the ideal self of the protagonist. This can be witnessed in *The Double* by Golyadkin's dream (137–140) in which the protagonist, “in the splendid company of people celebrated for their breeding and wit,” “distinguished himself by his amiability and wit, and everyone took a liking to him,” only to have his doppelganger arrive and

by so doing demolish at one fell swoop all the glory and triumph of Golyadkin senior, eclipsing him, dragging him into the mire and clearly demonstrating that Golyadkin senior, the real Mr Golyadkin, was not real at all but a fraud; *he* was the real one.

In fact, in reality Golyadkin junior never presumes to *be* Golyadkin senior and the latter never distinguishes himself by his amiability and wit; what is happening is that Golyadkin senior has created an image of his ideal self and has in his dream suffered its loss to his double. In actual encounters, such as we witness on the day following the dream, Golyadkin junior simply assumes the role of Golyadkin senior's ideal self, leaving the latter's real self to its own accustomed devices; standing ineffectually and believing that “everything was happening just as in [his] dream.” (151)

In Marechera's story the doppelganger does assume the narrator's identity; but it is hardly the same identity. Just before the doppelganger makes his appearance at the party, we are told, the narrator laughs and “[s]omething in my laughter startled them and they stared at me as though I was a housefly that had learnt to speak and to laugh.” (105) He then runs out of the room unsuccessfully holding down the vomit which propels him. This builds upon the growing image we have of our narrator as a ‘social failure’ who is intermittently aware of the fact but who resents it and escapes beneath a mask of dignity: “I had become something of a recluse. Receiving no one. Actually there was no one to receive. Nobody came” (103); further, he is uncomfortable at the party because it is full of old college “friends” and “I had never been popular among them. Rather the reverse.” (104) His double, on the other hand, having assumed his identity, becomes the life and soul of the party, talking volubly and entertaining the other guests by humiliating his “twin brother.” (107–108) Thus, Marechera's doppelganger appropriates both the self and the ideal self.

The humiliation and victimisation inflicted by his doppelganger which Marechera's character suffers further aligns him to Golyadkin senior: they are both pinched on the cheek by their supercilious adversary (Marechera, 106; Dostoyevsky, 108), and they are both openly exploited as a figure of fun; when he is confronted by his victim "Golyadkin junior looked around and winked at the surrounding clerks as if giving them to understand that the comedy would now begin," (108) and in 'introducing' his 'brother' Marechera's doppelganger says to the company: "He's a bit of fun, not quite all right in the head." (106)

Richard Rosenthal has written an insightful analysis of *The Double*, examining how, through his obsessive projection, Golyadkin utterly loses his sense of self: he "will find mirrors everywhere" and "[w]hile it is true that [he] takes himself as his object, his failure is in not also taking himself as his subject." (Rosenthal, 67) Not only does this account for Golyadkin's infuriating impotence in solving his own problems, but it also relates to his exacerbation of those problems by virtue of his projective inability to know "where he leaves off and the other person begins." (62) Rosenthal notes the irony of Golyadkin's antisocial behaviour:

Golyadkin's statements about how he is looking for "his own place" in the world, in order to "be himself," are belied by all his efforts. He appears determined to be anyone but, and we observe him pushing himself, or various aspects of himself, where he and they don't belong. This intrusiveness, through physical as well as psychic boundaries, gives concrete representation to the mechanism of projection. Literally, there is one gate-crashing scene after another. (67-68)

We have already noted the dubious claims of our narrator in "The Writer's Grain" to being "a recluse" and it is certainly questionable how welcome he is at the party: he visits his friend, they part, he then rushes back in a disturbed state and talks his friend "out of his ears," (102) at which point his friend invites him to the party having not done so already because, apparently, he had not realized the narrator was in town. He is certainly unwelcome at the residence of his wife and her lover, but having met the latter at the door, "I tried to push past him without wiping my boots," (113) after which this "recluse" proceeds to incite a violent, if ridiculous, struggle which culminates in a fire in the building for which our hero accepts no responsibility.

As Rosenthal notes of Golyadkin's "excessive reliance on projective mechanisms," such a sufferer finds that "all his efforts at self-assertion are experienced as being at someone else's expense, hence a kind of theft." (62) It is no wonder then that both Golyadkin and Marechera's narrator interpret their respective doppelgangers' attempts at self-assertion in the same way; and not just as a theft but specifically as a theft from them. However, as we have seen, this theft seems borne out in 'reality' only in Marechera's story, while in *The Double* there is no actual adoption by Golyadkin junior of Golyadkin senior's identity, only of his ideal self, and this exists exclusively in the mind of Golyadkin senior. This discrepancy is significant in terms, not so much of psychology, but of authorial emphasis. Rosenthal illustrates the confused process of Golyadkin's mind as his attempts to communicate and thereby 'save himself' are incessantly thwarted by the extreme projective structures by which he interprets his world. His projection is such, Rosenthal tells us, that

[j]ust as he believes other people can see through him, he believes they know what he is going to say before he says it. Consequently he refers to events as if the listener already knows what is on his mind, or he refers to everything as indirectly as possible, a language of allusion, while wondering whether he hasn't, in fact, said too much. (71)

In these terms it is inconceivable that Golyadkin could tell his own story, either directly to a friend or in writing; but this is just what Marechera's character achieves, and the style of his outpouring—frantic, obsessive and mad—is appropriate not only to his state of mind but also to Golyadkin's, if given voice. Marechera, or even his character (who is a writer), is able to convincingly render this voice by presenting the monologue as a transcript of the narrator's rant to a listener/reader who remains throughout wholly anonymous; s/he possesses a reader's anonymity in combination with the singularity of a complete stranger which undercuts even the concept of the hypothetical reader. That is, the narrator can only tell his story to a stranger in a bar, as the scene is, without assuming a projected knowledge within that stranger if the stranger remains strange (unknown); and he can only tell his story to an unknown reader if that reader does not take on the qualities of 'any given reader' (a definable and knowable concept of an individual). Thus, spoken/written to the listener/reader:

Will you have another? Good. What was it? Ah. Your very good health, sir. Madam. *Whatever the case is*. You understand, of course. I can never tell which is which nowadays. It's these newfangled fashions. And things. All very confusing. And what's worse, it's extremely negative. Good lord, I keep using that word. Which brings me back to my laboratory friend. . . .
(104) [*Italics mine*]

It is through this technique that Marechera is able to give us his narrator's direct impressions without contradicting our impressions of the narrator, and by virtue of this that we see his perception of the position of his doppelganger, which enlightens us further as to Golyadkin's perspective. Because Marechera's character is telling his own story, he can assume a fundamental bond exists between his real self and his ideal self (however illusory this may be from a 'realistic' or 'objective' point of view), and thus when his doppelganger takes possession of his ideal self the narrator perceives this as a theft of his whole self. As we have seen in *The Double*, this implication that Golyadkin junior is taking over Golyadkin senior's entire identity by appropriating his ideal self, can only be suggested by Dostoyevsky through Golyadkin's dreams and by the narration when it drifts close to Golyadkin's consciousness¹. I am not suggesting of course that one need read Marechera to understand Dostoyevsky, but the alternative perspective allows us to appreciate further the terror and anxiety which weighs upon Golyadkin, and this in turn perhaps explains the seemingly contradictory pomposity of Marechera's 'ass' of a character when he is given voice by a benevolent metafictional device.

Having established the foundation of this first story in "The Writer's Grain" series, we can now look at it in relation to "Thought-tracks In The Snow," a story which tells, in essence, of the same narrative events as its earlier 'double' but which lacks the fantastical, preternatural and psychological slant: there are no anthropomorphised dogs, no doppelgangers, no vicious attacks on cats, and the narration is clear, controlled and refrains from unstructured outpourings. The narrator of this story is, like his earlier counterpart, a middle-aged academic and writer whose wife is having an affair with one of his students, and the main action again climaxes

¹Although, as Rosenthal notes (80), this technique, far from having a clarifying effect, in fact "seriously interferes with the reader's efforts to distance himself, to achieve objectivity and detachment."

in a brawl involving these characters; and a dog is again present—fighting but not talking.

However, Marechera adds to the reader's confusion by suggesting that his narrator is in fact a version of himself: the narrator reminisces about a violent protest/demonstration/riot between black students and police at the University of Rhodesia, and his subsequent flight to England, to attend Oxford University. (143–144) These events parallel precisely Marechera's decampment from Rhodesia and his re-establishment at Oxford; but rather than subsequently being sent down, this version of Marechera seems to have settled comfortably into the English academic milieu. The association is brought home by the student, a Nigerian, in mid-fight exclaiming: "Fucking Rhodesians-get independence first, then perhaps you'll learn how to fight!" (147) This recalls to us the comments of the narrator in "Black Skin What Mask" (an overtly autobiographical story):

The black girls in Oxford . . . despised those of us who came from Rhodesia. After all, we still haven't won our independence. After all, the papers say we are always quarrelling among ourselves. . . . It was all quite unflattering. We had become—indeed we are—the Jews of Africa, and nobody wanted us. (97)

As with all such versions of himself, the author defies us categorizing them in terms of ideal, unideal, or otherwise, selves (although in the present context it is tempting to do so): this character represents 'success' which perhaps at times Marechera would have coveted, but this has also rendered him a "nigger jackass" and a "hypocrite," in his wife's words (he does not argue), and his inability to fight would not sit well with, for instance, the narrator of "House Of Hunger."

The decentring of the narrative voice across these stories is given further anarchic impetus by the student suggesting to the narrator that he should be "writing within our great tradition of oral literature rather than turning out pseudo-Kafka-Dostoyevsky stories." (143) This gives us to believe that the implied author of "The Writer's Grain" is in fact the narrator of "Thought-tracks In The Snow," himself a Marechera double, who is performing, in his 'writing' of the former story, a typically Marecherean fictionalization of his own experiences; with a "pseudo-Kafka-Dostoyevsky" slant, as is his apparent wont. It is worthwhile, then, to look again at "The Writer's Grain" in this light.

It is important to note that we are not attempting to 'analyse' these narratives as Nabakovian riddles, written with clues which challenge the reader to discover the inevitable answers; rather, the intention is to examine what we do know and to realize thereby the degree to which Marechera draws us, through the sheer seductiveness of his literature, into a web of intertextual relations without promising, designing, or intending us to discover, ultimate closure. For instance, the student in "The Writer's Grain" is called Marechera and is "a rugby type." (114) In rationalising this we could say that Marechera's double, the 'author' of this story and narrator of "Thought-tracks In The Snow," is seeking to distance himself from the narrator of "The Writer's Grain"; or that he is trying to imply a character relationship between his narrator (his literary double) and the student; or, forgetting this character, we could conclude that Marechera himself is seeking to distance himself from his narrator, or align himself to the student. The possibilities are limitless; and this analysis intends only to expose the openings into these possibilities, not to beat out of them redundant conclusions.

It is significant that despite the measured tone and demeanour of the narrator of "Thought-tracks In The Snow," at the beginning of this story he is disturbed by "[a] restless refrain [which] was repeatedly flashing through my mind: 'You're crazy, you're crazy, you're crazy'," (142) and which is still with him at the end, despite the apparently happy conclusion. It is perhaps this unease then which he wishes to represent in his fictionalizing of the events of this story, through his 'writing' of "The Writer's Grain." He is certainly questioning his perspective through the disturbed protagonist/narrator he constructs, who is a paranoid black radical, believing as he does that "the bloody animals looked and sounded and behaved as though they liked to be eaten only by whites. Not niggers, bleated the sheep. Not niggers," and claiming that "more than half of all English words directly or indirectly slur blackness—and I was teaching the bloody language and the bloody literature and also actually writing my novels in it." (111) The first statement may seem absurd, and the second perhaps extreme, but they do reveal a realistic cultural discomfort which throws into question the self-satisfied confidence with which the implied author ironically refers to his youthful "dabbling with politics" (144) and later claims to know "that deep inside me I had said goodbye to Africa, forever." (148)²

²It is also perhaps significant that the sentence following this begins, "The illusory dawn..."

Our implied author further perverts his own biography by creating, in his fiction, a daughter for whom he arranges an abortion, rather than a wife for whom in 'reality' he does the same. Bearing in mind that his wife is only eighteen, and they have been married for two years, it is also interesting to note that his fictional protagonist seems to possess incestuous feelings for his daughter:

Clara, now Clara. She's the spitting image of her mother. Sometimes when I'm absent-minded I find myself talking to her as though I was talking to her mother. It only confuses the issue of course. But she understands. God help me!—she understands. Ah, youth, youth! *She understands only too well.* (103) [Italics mine]

And: "I had not talked to a friendly face for quite a time. Ah, Clara..." (104)

It is also interesting to note that in "The Writer's Grain" we find characters who seem to embody the darker sides of Marechera's writing in "House Of Hunger": here it is the narrator, rather than sadistic but anonymous children, who kills the cat and seems to relish doing so (5–6; 110); and his doppelganger proudly claims that "[e]very woman is a stain on a sheet," (107) identifying him directly with the lascivious barman of the novella, and more generally with what "had made everything nasty." (41; 46) Precisely what all these slightly sinister details imply about characters, narrators, doppelgangers and authors, across the spectrum of these stories, is thankfully left to the imagination's leisure. And even what I have trusted of my own 'interpretation' is constantly questionable: "Thought-tracks In The Snow," for instance, could in fact have been 'written' by the narrator of "The Writer's Grain," fictionalizing realistically, in a moment of lucidity, his own bizarre experiences.

All this draws us into what Melissa Levin and Laurice Taitz have rather ostentatiously termed Marechera's "autobiographicalization of fiction" and "fictionalization of autobiography." Levin and Taitz point out that Marechera, resisting the authority of narrative, creates texts in dialogue with one another, thus rejecting closure and undermining concretized identity. This applies, they suggest, to both his fictional characters who become autonomous and to his own biography which, in its relationship with his texts, takes on the momentary and arbitrary qualities of memory and imagination—the unreliable foundation for autobiography. Thus far in our investigations we have witnessed this deconstructive act liberating the texts (in

the Barthesian sense) of two of Marechera's early stories. Marechera, from a very personal point of view, has outlined the process thus:

My father's mysterious death when I was eleven taught me—like nothing would ever have done—that everything, including people, is unreal. That, like Carlos Castaneda's Don Juan, I had to weave my own descriptions of reality into the available fantasy we call the world. I describe and live my descriptions. This, in African lore, is akin to witchcraft. . . . [T]he descriptions were the only weird "things" I cared to name "truth". They were the heart of my writing and I did not want to explain my descriptions because they had become my soul, fluid and flowing with the phantom universe in which our planet is but a speck among gigantic galaxies. (Marechera, 1984. 123)

As we have seen, this system of self-apprehension allows a subjective freedom from imposed reality; and in terms of literature this makes way for fluidity of character and idea. It must be emphasised also, that in an imaginative world this process is neither deconstructivist for deconstruction's sake, nor need it be wholly retrospective; that is, not only does historical identity become fluid, but so also does fictional futurity, grounded as it is in that history.

It is significant that in the above passage Marechera associates the process explicitly with the death of his father, because his father's death, his viewing of the body at the morgue, and the stuttering he associates with this upheaval, form important leitmotifs (in various fictional guises) throughout Marechera's literature. For instance, in "The Slow Sound Of His Feet" (Marechera, 1978. 134–137) the protagonist, in the first paragraph, speaks of his stuttering, his father's death, and seeing his father at the mortuary. However, it is also obvious that this is not Marechera; or, at least, there are significant differences between him and Marechera (as we also found in "Thought-tracks In The Snow"): his father seems educated, there are books in the house, he has only one sibling (a sister), and his mother is killed by soldiers. Also, this character's stuttering is so bad that it renders him almost dumb, and this recalls the images of Patricia and Richter from "House Of Hunger," the former significant, as we shall discuss in more detail later, by virtue of her rejection of and by society, symbolised by her speechlessness; and the latter because "[h]e had become one of those characters upon whom silence rather than intellect bestows a

certain transcendental dignity." (69) In this light we can perceive the suggestion of potential psychological transcendence being integral to the narrator of "The Slow Sound Of His Feet," in the face of the brutality and terrorism with which his society confronts him. However, when we meet him his obsession with his speech, or lack thereof, seems to deny him this potential: there is no dignity in dreaming about having your tongue cut up.

So great is his anxiety and despair that he projects his struggle upon other silent or inarticulate forces about him, having not learnt himself the language of silence: "I could see him stretched out in the sodden grave and trying to move his mandibles. When I woke up I could feel him inside me; and he was trying to speak, but I could not"³; "The sun was screaming soundlessly"; "The room was so silent I could feel it trying to move its tongue and its mandibles, trying to speak to me." With the "merciful" appearance of his skeletal parents, however, the narrator begins to be made aware of the possibility of "weaving [his] own descriptions of reality," and the affection of his sister seems to quell his final tormented cry of despair: "I had to speak! but before I could utter a single sound she bent down over me and kissed me. The hot flush of it shook us in each other's arms." He is beginning to understand the freedom which resides in silence and the resistance of inarticulacy; resistance against the forces (political, social and, subsequently, psychological) which oppress him. This is not, of course, ultimate freedom and resistance, nor is it even to be felt by the external powers of authority (represented here by the army); indeed, it is the power of his own language, his own system of interpretation and representation, the source of his own "transcendental dignity." It is the fact that this resistance does not speak the language of the oppressors that endows upon it its invulnerable capacity and power. The fight may be bound to eternity, but at least each side controls equally its own expression. Marechera concludes his story with an image of these forces (articulate and inarticulate) playing off against one another: "[o]utside, the night was making a muffled gibberish upon the roof and the wind had tightened its hold upon the windows. We could hear, in the distance, the brass and strings of a distant military band."

Drawing us further into the Marechera stream of character, it is enlightening to

³There is here an implication of the narrator's guilt regarding his stuttering and his father, who had either suffered himself or, more likely, had wanted his son to be cured. This implies perhaps the 'cause' of the narrator's obsession with his impediment.

note that the narrator in "The Slow Sound Of His Feet" attempts, in an artistic manifestation of what we have been discussing, to "paint the feeling of the silent but desperate voices inside me." This identifies him further with Patricia, a painter and poet, and represents generally the isolation of the 'unintelligible' poet or artist, foreshadowing Buddy's "stuttering explanations" (Marechera, 1984. 57) in the face of incomprehension.

We shall return to this theme of the isolation of the artist, but before we do so it is necessary to follow the thread of the dead father/mortuary scene into the sphere of Marechera's later writing, as collected in *Scrapiron Blues*, where we find the image surviving and enlightening our readings of these works. It is interesting to look firstly at the character of Joe in "When Rainwords Spit Fire," who, discounting the mysterious character of Silas's father, is the one identifiably unsympathetic character in this exceptionally sympathetic novella. Joe and his long-suffering wife recall the following image Marechera evokes in *Mindblast*:

A baby strapped onto her back. Another strapped against her belly. Yet another trailing behind. And on her head the huge crate of worldly possessions, and she three paces behind her man, who is leisurely hurrying carrying nothing but the patriarchal power granted him by both custom and tradition. (145)

Joe is habitually unfaithful, he drinks away his meagre earnings, and is thought of by his wife, in a relatively happy moment, as her "fifth child . . . whose horizon was his wages, beer, his cigarettes." (135) Less idealistically, she thinks of him thus: "wondering whether *he* would come home drunk and violent. She was pregnant again, which was against the doctor's advice but, of course, *he* did not care." (139) But the worst indictment of Joe we get, he provides us with himself. We see him as trapped in a cruel society, and tragically aware of his hopeless position, and for this we nearly pity him; but his selfishness, insensitivity and total lack of empathy cause this pity to sit ill with us, particularly as Marechera paints for us so many other, more likable characters, in worse and more pitiable positions than Joe's. In his self-pity it seems not to occur to Joe to even consider another human being's point of view, and his envy of others is simply for what they have, the implication being that if *he* had it, all would be well—his universe is thus defined by his wants and by no greater humanitarian concern:

Joe was on fire, smouldering low, somewhere in his brain, watching the local primary school teachers who always sat together, sharing cigarettes and talking loudly in English. A sort of aristocracy. They were never short of money, those teachers. After all, like the ads said, education was the gateway to Success. And Success was never short of Money. There were all these girls and you could have all of them if you had it. The monetary chance to happen.... He thought wistfully of his wife. That was another joke. You thought you were in love. You thought you were marrying a delicious dream, but you woke up and she was just an engine programmed to create babies by the dozen. You looked at her and you saw a female engine that dripped monthly and spewed out babies every nine months. (141)

However, just as we begin to feel we know Joe well enough to characterise him as a contemptible symbol of the patriarchy and to dismiss him as such, Marechera rejects this wholesale condemnation in a flash by creating a bond between himself and Joe which also draws the reader into a sympathetic relationship with him whom s/he had just moments before rejected. Joe is thinking on his job at the mortuary:

He had lost his temper only once when a widow had dragged in an eleven-year-old boy who was screaming: "I don't want to see him, mama!"

But she had grabbed his head and forced him to see the "last of your father" and the boy had looked, and looked, all the noise and protest blown out of him by the sight of his terribly mangled father.

"You are killing him too," Joe said pointing at the boy. (141)

Thus Joe suddenly becomes a hero, offering Marechera potential or symbolic support, even companionship, in reconciling the familiar scene:

Sunlit memories?

Rather My butchered father

On a mortuary slab, and I,

All of eleven years old, refusing

But forced to look. I know now: Learn

Mortality early and you are doomed

To forever walk alone. (Marechera, 1992. 36)

We thus become tentatively sympathetic towards Joe, and even find that when he is not consumed with violent self-pity, searching for someone to blame, his philosophical reflections are insightful and he even becomes, momentarily, a recognisable mouthpiece for Marechera:

Each day death expands the space it occupies in our hearts. What was it Max said before he started blubbering? We are accidents waiting for a chance to happen. That was it. You waited and waited but nothing happened. Nothing has happened today to drag my inner core into luminous being.... *Growing old is the discovery of the means to keep the illusion going. The illusion of me, of the community, of the nation.* All endlessly waiting for a chance to happen. (150) [Italics mine]

The significance of Joe's seemingly contradictory 'status' in the novella lies in its contradictions. Nothing Joe represents is new to the reader, and in this sense his 'character' is irrelevant; what is relevant, however, is that his characterisation is self-disrupting, mercurial and defies categorisation. His alignment to Marechera causes us to define him in terms of his creator, and also his creator in terms of him, an act which alerts us not to anything specific about either, but to the dangers of assumption in a chaotic universe. The last we see of Joe is his needless flight from the police who have, we must assume, come to tell him of his son's injury. He runs because "[a] policeman at your heels always means you're in the wrong somehow" (153)—Joe's confusion is equal only to our own.

His intimate relationship to the Marechera mortuary scene causes us to associate Joe with Harold of "Fragments" who himself operates in curious twinship, but also ambiguous counterpoint, to Craig of "The Intellectual's Revolt," part five of "The Concentration Camp." We initially encounter Harold waking up "to find all his sisters pregnant" (Marechera, 1994. 127) and the ensuing mental strain which he suffers directs us without warning into witnessing his familiar dream:

But the scene, pulsing brighter and brighter against dark memory, returned. He watched. The mortuary attendant drew open the big drawer. Something long and bulky was underneath the stained sheet.... The battered skull swivelled to face him directly. He scrunched his eyes shut. Refusing. Denying. Shaking his head furiously.
....

That was father, the voice inside him whispered. (128)

Further, the reader also notes the associative significance of Harold's "breakdown" at school which "left him with a wonderful realisation of the mind's fragility: it must be defended against certain 'things'." (130) This of course recalls the breakdown suffered by the narrator of "House Of Hunger" (28-34) and draws Harold even further into the possible realm of a Marecherean stock character. But, in fact, Harold is anything but; he is unremarkable in the extreme, a "minor functionary in the ministry of construction," (129) defined only by his superlative cynicism and bitter resentment of existence: "He may as well have worn a t-shirt emblazoned with Abandon All Hope..." (129) In this sense, it is true, Harold is typically Marecherean but what distinguishes him, and this is significant, is that he feels no compunction to in any way share his feelings with the world: he is not an artist, a revolutionary, a rebel or an anarchist; indeed he does not even narrate his own story or wear the prescribed t-shirt. Harold simply is. And the irony here is that through the fragmented evidence of "Fragments," Marechera suggests that Harold, of all the more philosophical and politically minded characters to which his cynicism draws him into allegiance, comes the closest to achieving a precarious equipoise whereby he can live out his days at least in part convinced by his own rationalisations.

He is not always convinced of course, and the opening scene locks this fact into our consciousness and renders more heavy the doubt in our minds when Marechera dubiously informs us that "Harold liked to think he had given up on people." (129) Whether or not this scene is in fact a dream [Marechera never confirms or denies his comment that Harold "was, perhaps, still dreaming" (127)] it bears witness to the fact that Harold is not as emotionally independent as he likes to believe, that the actions of others can indeed incite him to violence, and it contradicts his claim that other people "were not his responsibility; they were their own lookout." (130) Also, belief in family honour seems to sit ill with such a rugged individualist as Harold, and it is his family which seems to obsess him, given, as we have seen, that this scene is followed by the harrowing memories of his father. These first two images of Harold, however, are given in a nocturnal context, hinting at the subconscious play of obscure memories or ideas within an unknown dream world. And, as we learn later, Harold has a "growing fear of being alone at night in his flat." (129) Certainly this all implies a latent fury burgeoning within Harold's psyche, and as

such seems to refute my proclamation of his equipoise, but the overall tone of the story is not so despondent and it is my contention that Harold's psyche is in fact relatively healthy.

The final scenes of the story are set in the light of day and while Harold's eyes are, as he walks along, "scanning the ground for answers" (130) this is not a fervent search nor indeed one which occupies his mind particularly; if he stumbles upon answers, perhaps, this will please him, if not he will absent-mindedly continue scanning. In this world Harold's mind is content by virtue of the pragmatic cynicism with which he views his existence, and he can even plan to alleviate his night-time suffering: by cultivating his relationship with Virgo he can avoid future nights alone, and "when the inevitable break-up occur[s]" (129) he can balance his flat with his office, and provide in his waking hours solace from his sleep. This solace comes from the perpetual effort to defend his mind from the "things" he learnt of during his "breakdown." His work achieves this because it blocks them out altogether (130) and in his personal existence his uncompromising pessimism does the same. Whether or not he *has* given up on people, whether or not he *is* as independent as he tells himself; these questions are irrelevant as long as he can continue convincing himself, if not us, that the answers are 'yes' and continue conducting himself "as an ageing invalid whose hold on reality depend[s] on an extreme refusal to acknowledge his sickness." (130) The fact that he is unaware of his precarious position works in his favour because what he notes of Virgo's "easy smiling grace," by definition, applies equally pertinently to him: "If this [is] a mask, then all masks are true." (130) It is because his mask fits well, remains intact, and seems to have a life-time guarantee that our final image of Harold, contrasting as it may with our Marechera-influenced preconceptions, is of a man "with a light heart." (130)

It is doubtful whether Craig of "The Intellectual's Revolt" has ever had a light heart, and yet in terms of general world-view this character has an intimate relationship with Harold. The disparity between them, I believe, arises from the fact that, as the title of the story suggests, Craig compulsively intellectualises his perspective, a self-defeating act which constantly denies him an axiomatic base to believe in fundamentally, which could allow him to rationalise his position. For Harold, as we have seen, such a base is defined by his cynicism and Craig comes close to sharing this, but he goes too far: he is cynical about his cynicism, and that can be a very

dangerous game. It is also important to note that Craig's failure is, by implication, also Marechera's; Craig and Harold are both Marechera-types but, as we have seen, Harold is distanced from his creator by virtue of his non-intellectualism and his anonymous position in society—the foundations of his equipoise—while Craig, significantly, does not enjoy such a distancing.

All that is left Craig is his anger; but even this is not free from the disease of his mind:

Craig drops the book. Drops the present. He concentrates on his anger. He watches carefully, concentrates, watches it grow. From a dull insignificant baby, thumb firmly in mouth, it grows into a morose looking youth who does not know why he is there at all; it then grows into a bespectacled faintly smiling student on graduation day; and finally into the shape that is sitting in the armchair, a book on the floor. (Marechera, 1994. 180)

And his teaching is plagued by him "all the time ironically observing himself." (185) This analytical detachment of Craig's, as well as his intellectual amorality, is forced to undergo the ultimate test of endurance; Craig killed his wife, and while we are to understand that it was in some way an act of mercy, Craig's society did not see it that way and he has been in prison and been labelled a murderer. To an extent Craig's skills in rationalisation are up to the task:

He has stopped asking himself what's wrong. If this is how it is, then that's how it is. It's years since his graduation day. What's wrong? It's three years since he came out of jail. He had killed his wife. He notices but ignores the cockroach. What's wrong with a cockroach anyway? (181)

Here we see Craig applying in his mind the logic behind the question, 'what's wrong with a cockroach?', to both his moral imposition, as a killer, and to his psychological state, as a malcontent. Marechera implies a similar logic in his poem "Did You Ask What's Wrong with War?":

There are no wrong words, right?
 There are no wrong trees, right?
 There is no wrong sand, right?
 I've slept the world in frilly
 underwear
 Dreamed I buggered all the little boys

who are future leaders
 Fucked all the funny little girls made of
 thatch and ghandy
 My anarchist arse has shat on society
 And LOOK millions of open flies
 are homing in on your wide-open lips. (Marechera, 1992. 185)

The logic seems irrefutable: nothing can be wrong, therefore there is not anything wrong. It may not seem a pleasant logic (it is not even strictly logical given that it employs two different definitions of 'wrong'), but if believed by Craig, or anyone, it would make their personal life more tolerable, just as Harold's beliefs, however unsavoury to the outsider, help him to survive. But Craig, however hard he tries, cannot believe it, not because of what it is, but because he cannot believe anything. For instance, a natural corollary to the argument would run: if there is no judgement, no fundamental metaphysical truth, then no action or thing can be distinguished in metaphysical terms; and Craig argues this thus: "Everything is the same—the illusion of difference is caused by the varying degrees of emotion brought to each particular." But then he concludes of this argument: "Rot, of course," (181) which undermines not merely this argument but also the earlier passage, by which he had absolved himself, which is its basis.

Craig's other recourse to potential peace of mind is through a satisfied fatalism, expecting nothing and accepting everything. As he puts it to himself:

The trick was to convince yourself (and accept) that this was all there was,
 all there was ever going to be. . . . You got on with it—the rest was without
 enchantment, without that enticing rubescence which for some is the aura
 of childhood, the tug of those salad days. (187)

The significant idea here, though, is put parenthetically: *to accept*; this, as we have seen, is what Harold can do; but Craig cannot accept anything. He can formulate the argument but he must always look further, and this leads to self-contradiction and again an excursion into the metaphysical, the rejection of which his intellect demands, but the attraction of which he finds too great to resist: he hopes "that there lurk[s] some meaning beyond the shadowline of impossible intent" (186) and wonders:

Shouldn't everything be asked? And after the asking, to ask again—and

again. Then perhaps, a light would interrupt the dismal horizon with intimations, notions of a pliant fate. Not this seemingly predestined, preordained, *fated* fate. (182)

Thus, the quandary which defines Craig's existence results from a romantic, humanistic rejection of fatalism, combined, paradoxically, with an inability to devote himself to an idea of human or even individual endeavour, constructed as these are upon arbitrary, subjective grounds. This paradox is this intellectual's "revolt." He cannot, unlike Goncharov's Oblomov, resign himself to his "fixed purpose in life" (Goncharov, 466) despite the convincing arguments he (at times) presents in favour of such action. Oblomov himself has not always been convinced by *his* arguments either; indeed early in the novel he only mentions fate when his feelings of guilt, born of his antisocial laziness, and his despair at not being able to understand the cause of his 'problem', exhaust him and he slips again into a state of somnolence:

Oh, how dreadful he felt when there arose in his mind a clear and vivid idea of human destiny and the purpose of a man's life, and when he compared this purpose with his own life. . . .

....

'Why am I like this?' Oblomov asked himself almost with tears, hiding his head under the blanket again. 'Why?'

After seeking in vain for the hostile source that prevented him from living as he should, as 'others' lived, he sighed, closed his eyes, and a few minutes later drowsiness began once again to benumb his senses.

.... 'It's fate, I suppose—can't do anything about it,' he was hardly able to whisper, overcome by sleep. (101–102)

This rationalisation is obviously, at this point, an expedient placebo, and is of course countered by the succeeding action of the novel where Oblomov, under the unrelenting supervision of his friend Stolz, makes various efforts (all unsuccessful) to 'improve himself'; and, indeed, it is not until he can articulate his belief in, and resignation to, his fate to Stolz that the sincerity of that bittersweet resignation is convincing to both himself and the reader, purveying as it does a hitherto unseen dignity upon Oblomov:

'Oh, Andrey [Stolz], I am aware of everything and I understand everything: I have for a long time been ashamed to live in the world! But I can't go on

the same road as you even if I wanted to.' 'You go and don't wait for me. I am worthy of your friendship, God knows, but I'm not worth your trouble.' (474)

Perhaps, then, Craig, like Oblomov, could learn to accept his fate; but this seems unlikely given that, as we have seen, this would involve accepting that "[e]verything is the same" which Craig says is "[r]ot." And why does he believe it is rot? Because, if we look to his next thought: "*She made me do it.*" The implication is that by attempting to divest himself of the responsibility for his wife's death, Craig is acknowledging that her death is significant, that everything would not be the same if he had not killed her. How could the dichotomy between her life or death merely be "an illusion of difference" if Craig must defend himself, to himself, for engendering that "illusion"? The antithesis to this conflict of belief which Craig suffers can be found in the mind of Albert Camus's outsider who, in his penultimate stand-off with the Arabs, one of whom he will very shortly murder, realizes (and believes) "that one might fire, or not fire—and it would come to absolutely the same thing," (53) and who, after his conviction, happily states that "I laid my heart open to the benign indifference of the universe." (103) Craig, then, cannot convince himself to adopt either Oblomov's pathetic acceptance or Meursault's vaguely sinister fatalism, and so must search for meaning, purpose, belief and direction.

This search leads him, as we have seen, to believing in the notion of "a pliant fate" which in itself is paradoxical—and thereby reveals Craig's doubts about it—but which, if believed in, implies a freedom of will. This idea leads Craig into the tumultuous uncertainty which Ivan Karamazov's Grand Inquisitor describes as the "terrible burden [of] freedom of choice," (320) where he must knowingly decide for himself his actions and beliefs and willingly take responsibility for these. This touches upon Sartre's *nausea*, but more importantly for Craig, it requires faith in the irrational, or even the ability to take the irrational seriously, and this is a faith and a gravity which Craig cannot muster. Harold's defences against those "certain things" are irrational, but within that irrationality there is a ruthless logic (including axiomatic belief) which ensures the success of the defence. For example, expecting nothing of other people is one of Harold's tactics, one of his beliefs, and it is, in a sense, a ridiculous belief: Harold could in fact expect a lot from other people and be only occasionally disappointed, but because he will not tolerate even

occasional disappointment he must, as he does, adopt a policy which ensures no conceivable risk. As Marechera tells us of this tactic, it “made anything possible and everything impossible.” (129) Craig, however, insistently mocks or is mocked by his defenses. In his encounter with a man (or perhaps himself in a mirror) who is “[j]ust trying to be friendly,” (184) for instance, Craig’s defense-of-cynicism becomes parodic and self-defeating: he sneers “vainly” and his ‘punch line’, “[a]re you hinting I’m part of this society?” appears not only self-indulgent, but also rehearsed. When Craig then wags a “dignified admonitory finger” we wonder whether it is aimed at his interlocutor’s presumptuousness, or his own pretentiousness, whether he is not again “ironically observing himself.” We also see this self-mockery in Craig’s contemplation of suicide, the ultimate defense:

He staggered down to the Thames Embankment, clambered up and was about to jump when he noticed something wrong with the water.

Dirty.

That’s what it was: filthy.

I’m not drowning myself in *that!*

A patrolling officer found him there raving with demented laughter. (185)

[Italics Marechera’s]

The contradictions and paradoxes we have been exploring are borne out in the stream of consciousness towards the end of the story. Here the concept of irrational ideas (represented by the “beauty of flowers,” so seemingly fundamental) and the colourful paths of belief these open up, is played off against grey fatalism; the latter leads nowhere, while the former leads to a hegemony (as both a “king” and a “knuckleduster”) of conscripted faith:

The beauty of flowers lies in thinking thoughts that hurt. The path splits into several paths which must all be taken simultaneously. . . . grey daylight filters deep into grey memory at once effaced the blank slate on which to chalk tomorrow’s colours . . . in dream propose daylight a walking nightmare this rude rubescent (so raw) glow of fleshmembers in bright midnight day’s spade and hoe (to sculpt or torture) . . . do I remain when character is clawed out by chance and circumstance . . . to know is not enough more is demanded than I ever borrowed each finger is king holding down a string of thought stroking ear and lip to life and delight this bracelet of firewords my

knuckleduster for night's bright innuendoes... thinking thoughts that hurt.
(191–192) [Final ellipsis Marechera's.]

Rejection of fatalism, which as we have seen Craig's state necessitates, has in a sense the capacity to over-ride concomitant rejection of irrational belief, because fatalism, if momentarily entertained, must be passive, must inspire a state of absolute non-analysis, whilst irrational beliefs are infinite in number, limited only by the imagination, and can 'spring upon' the unsuspecting mind at any time. Further, the act of rejection is not passive and implies a cognitive 'idea' behind the rejection; this in itself heralds a belief. Craig, I suggest, lives not by, but through, irrational beliefs; they are always there but they are also constantly rejected by him, and this is his downfall.

Craig is one of those whom The Grand Inquisitor describes as "intractable and savage" who, in the face of their world, a "labyrinth ... [of] miracles and ... insoluble mysteries," will "destroy themselves." (324) This prophecy's validity can be seen in terms of Craig's drinking; his only recourse, and a self-destructive one, when confronted by his incomprehensible existence, is to alcohol, and alcohol is the one constant throughout the story: there is drinking in almost all of the myriad scenes. And, of course, the final image of Craig, drunk, helpless and pathetic, provides the crowning impression of this tragedy of despairing humanity.

If we cast our minds back at this point to the thread which led us to Craig (Marechera's use of the combined motifs of the dead father and the affliction of stuttering), it is interesting to look briefly at a recent Zimbabwean novel, *Pawns*, by the young writer Charles Samupindi. This impressive work tells the story of Daniel, a poor, helpless and hopeless boy, living in a Rhodesian ghetto, who, at the age of eighteen and searching for pride and identity, joins Robert Mugabe's ZANU to become a guerilla fighter in *Chimurenga*, the liberation struggle. He is then transformed into Commander Fangs, heroic fighter and intelligent strategist, only to return, at the end of the war and after independence, to his previous state of abject poverty and societal superfluity, with his family dead (civilians who have been killed by the war) and his future again hopeless. As well as the immediate political context, the novel investigates the nature of power, the fragility of identity, the unreliability and inconstancy of perception, the elusiveness of 'reality', and the futility of attempting to live a 'meaningful' life. It is interesting at this point to look

at Daniel's description of his home life:

Ever since that man, my father, made his cruel exit from our lives, when he was crushed off his bicycle while riding home one night. At the cemetery they forced me to look into his faceless face—crushed beyond recognition. My God!... And that's when this horrible stutter began. (19–20)

One is reminded of Marechera's own comments in *Mindblast*: "Plagiarism is out. Pastiche, good pastiche can be in." (135) Samupindi's effort is the latter, and it strikes the reader that he is acknowledging a sincere debt to Marechera through his use of the image. Daniel's stutter in fact disappears early in his revolutionary life, and is not mentioned again, but Samupindi has signified a literary influence which extends beyond a simple *lietmotif*, which informs, indeed, to varying degrees the entire body of his work.

Marechera's doubles, whom we have to date identified by their sharing of certain characteristics with their author, roam the pages of Marechera's fiction and are endowed with an autonomy which often confounds their authorial 'identification' and creates a multi-faceted literary ambiguity in which lies their significance. Their 'identification' with Marechera, in conjunction with other aspects of themselves or other perceptions of themselves, can serve to imply a condemnation of the author who, it is suggested, shares these qualities also. Harold's bleak and oppressively unrelenting nihilism, and Craig's tragic drunkenness are perhaps examples of this. But also, as I have suggested, Marechera uses these characters and their idiosyncratic uniqueness to imply the possible natures of hypothetical selves which, living in their metaphoric parallel universe, can astonish, intrigue and frighten us by their natures. These hypothetical selves, as we saw with the narrator of "Thought-tracks In The Snow," are judged as neither fundamentally 'good' nor 'bad', but are rather the vehicles by which Marechera can evoke empathy for individuals by way of a common experience or feeling, perverted by an uncommon fate. The implication, in terms of a non-fundamental humanitarianism, is that the ubiquitous common experience is conception, while all that comes after is fate. To make this idea more comprehensible, however, Marechera constructs a more unique common experience, such as a mortuary scene, and applies to it a more incontrovertible fate, such as involving a different person seeing it from a different point of view and thus reacting to it differently. By artificially creating this bond between the otherwise unique

human beings who are himself, the narrator of "The Slow Sound Of His Feet," and Harold from "Fragments," Marechera creates a fissure in our preconceptions which enables us to more fully 'understand', or empathise with, a character/being and potentially any character/being. Marechera articulates this idea in *The Black Insider* when he talks of

all the versions of yourself that did not come out of the womb with you. It is of them that I write. But they have the face of all the ones who did come out with me; the ones who did no wrong but found themselves in the dock on trial for their innocence and their country; the ones who wear their skeletons on the outside, always in fear of massacres devastating the territory enclosed in their skull and feeling; the one's who have been exposed all their waking and dreaming life to the ordinance map of their own madness. (107)

In other words, everyone.

An exemplary Marecherean character of this nature is Edmund from "House Of Hunger" whose first significant appearance in the novella is as a guerrilla fighter whose photo (a two dimensional monological portrait) appears in a newspaper, and whose identity is unknown; even, initially, to the narrator. (60) Not only, however, do we eventually learn part of his 'story', but it is a story which paints a picture of a tortured individual who, partly through his close relationship with Marechera, leaves the reader with an uneasy comprehension of Edmund as paradoxical victim, visionary, madman and fool.

Edmund is drawn into a disfunctional relationship with the narrator of "House Of Hunger," Marechera's fictional self or double, firstly by way of his father who, we are told, "died of alcohol poisoning after a fantastic night out on the town with my father." (61) Then we learn that Edmund liked the narrator at school (61) despite the fact that this character had been, and was, one of his tormentors. (60)⁴ It is this character also who helps Edmund after his thrashing at the hands of Stephen, a "typical African bully." (63-66) And, like Marechera, Edmund has a passion for Russian literature. (61) The distinguishing feature of Edmund, however, is the obsessive and uncompromising nature of his individualism, "doggedly liv[ing] out his tortured dreams in the face of humiliation." (61) He stubbornly maintains

⁴The narrator tells us that "[e]veryone, including myself, had always been nasty to him...."

his aloofness and pride, and these qualities are not, it is implied, unjustifiable; indeed, there even seems to be a hint of retrospective envy on the part of the narrator that Edmund had the insight at the time to refuse "to have anything to do with our student armchair politics." (60) And yet his obsessiveness is Edmund's downfall: his note-taking which degenerates into the writing of "mere transcripts of almost every book in the library" implies a mind self-defeatingly concerned with intellectual perfection rather than expediently absorbing enough to constitute a solid and comprehensible (albeit one dimensional) world-view. This leads to his academic failure (61) which gives us an impression of the defeat of a precarious genius.

This enthusiasm and defeat applies to more than just Edmund's scholastic achievements. When the narrator tries to dissuade him from his resolve to fight Stephen, Edmund asks rhetorically, "What else is there?," (65) which identifies him peculiarly with two other characters from the novella who also ask this question: the siblings Harry and Immaculate. (12) This unlikely triumvirate is defined by its members' individual beliefs in an ideal, however disparate those ideals may be; in the *belieflies* the significance. Harry believes in 'success', defined in terms of assimilating white culture and epitomised by having white women; Immaculate believes in her love and her feeling which transcends the torture of her existence, and for which she returns to the House of Hunger (6) while our narrator spends the entirety of the novella leaving it; and Edmund believes in his honour and the autonomy of his mind, and the need to defend these totally. This is why he fights Stephen and it is this which is destroyed by the superlative beating he receives; the knowledge, which can only be gained thus, that his defiance is, as the narrator tells him, "not a Petersburg story," (65) ruins not only the story but Edmund along with it. He is what he believes, and as his belief is literally beaten out of him, so too is his identity. Harry undergoes a similar trauma in a later story when he is confronted by his 'friends' whom he has betrayed to the police. (88-92) In a melodramatic scene of gangsterish proportions Harry, forced to gamble (winners never gamble) and "seeing failure everywhere," (90) undergoes a silent bodily shattering of ideological identity. The "maddening high-pitched needles" which mutely emanate from his being are the sounds of the transformation he had not counted upon where he unwittingly personifies his own definition of evil (88) and is destroyed by irreconcilable contradiction.

Edmund's brutalised beliefs are defined very much in terms of nihilistic European intellectualism and implicitly reject the African nationalism which Stephen represents. When these beliefs are shattered and Edmund loses all self-respect, the appropriate terminology for this self-negation come from the ugliest aspect of European thought; and when he says, "I'm a baboon, I'm a monkey," (66) he is confronting in himself the fiction of Joseph Conrad's horror which he had satirised earlier in the novella. (36) He believes that European thought has not failed him, but that he has failed it by presuming to approach it as an equal and presuming that it can treat a black person as a subject rather than merely an object. Marechera advocates unequivocally in his work precisely these presumptions, but Edmund's fate, rightly or wrongly, has forced him onto the opposite path. His fate has, from Stephen's point of view, taught Edmund 'his place' and now, as a 'true' African brandishing his colonised mind [we recall Stephen's nightmares (64)], Edmund must pay penance for his adolescent conceit by fighting for the decolonisation of his and his people's body, but ignoring forever his previous freedom to believe.

If we return now to Buddy's "stuttering explanations" we can investigate the imaginative fates Marechera inflicts upon his alter-egos who are identified by their relationship to him as alienated and misunderstood poets and artists. We shall concentrate on Buddy's experiences, but it will aid us to first explore this character's antecedents, Owen and Nick from *The Black Insider* and *Black Sunlight*, who provide the necessary paradigms of identity which, in their ultimate ambiguity, lend disturbing significance to Buddy's fate. As Flora Veit-Wild notes in her introduction to *The Black Insider*, which was initially rejected for publication and which served as the basis for *Black Sunlight*:

Though the two books are, on the whole, separate entities (when Marechera tried to revise he always came up with something entirely new), some of the themes are interlinked and certain passages near the end of both books, including the Owen/Nick episodes, are more or less identical. (5)

It seems both logical and reasonable, then, to examine Owen and Nick in conjunction, not as the same character but as representing very similar ideas.

Owen, who like Nick is fated to "go out there in a hysterical rage against 'everything' and be shot down" (Marechera, 1990. 104; Marechera, 1980. 109), represents

the alienation of the "brilliant" minds of the young generation who, in newly independent Zimbabwe, do not possess "the ruthless stamina required to breathe the mighty breath of a united nation," and cannot accept "a prefabricated identity and consciousness made up of the rouge and lipstick of the struggle and the revolution." (105) For mental survival these isolated individuals must believe utterly in their own perceptions, in their own self-descriptions, and this rests upon a self-obsession which sits ill with an intelligent mind. As the narrator says,

there was nothing of us left except the clothes we were wearing; nothing left except the paintings we painted on to the painted walls; nothing left except the poem [sic] and stories I sweated blood to bleed out of me; nothing left except the self-consciousness that could only give, and give unreservedly, in novels like this. (107)

This self-consciousness is the necessary contradiction of those who, having lost their African identity but feeling also the bitter irony of their "preternatural urge to consume to the hilt the beads and art trophies in the whiteman's bin," (106) must obstinately claim their right to be "at once supremely [them]selves and the caricature of them." (106) Their education defies them embracing the cause of their nation and so renders them isolated, with only their education to cling to for identity; and this identity, for their own security, must be clung to ruthlessly, at all costs, being the only concrete ideal, however self-defeating, they know. And it is an ideal of perpetual uncertainty: "We had used to joke about being fucked out by everything but never to the extent of seeing the uttermost truth at the centre of the jest." (104-105) In *The Black Insider*, Marechera is in fact so cynical about his characters' education that he believes that it allows them to offer nothing to their country, even on its own terms. That is, there is no implication here that if Owen was not misunderstood, then he could offer something to his people. Their "veneer of experience," (105) it is suggested, leaves them so wholly perplexed and impotent that their estrangement from their country is total.

This is not the case with Nick from *Black Sunlight*. This character, derived though he is from Owen, is closer to Marechera in terms of the fact that he is a self-proclaimed poet who has a faith in the value of his work and believes that "[t]hose who do not understand my work are simply illiterate. One must learn." (110) Nick's belief, which foreshadows that of Buddy, allows him to take his artistic investigations

seriously, and Christian's appraisal of this quality could easily be spoken by Owen or the narrator of *The Black Insider*: "Nick always embarrassed me. He was too transparently innocent. As I had never really been." This is the innocence of faith, of following to the utmost the pursuit of an ideal, in this case art. Nick's fervour in this pursuit can be seen in the passion with which he approaches his experimental, surrealist, futurist vision of artistic apotheosis, even after he has given up public readings:

But he was happy, extolling the love of danger, the habit of energy and valour. The catchwords were: courage, audacity, and rebellion. The subjects were forward motion, feverish sleeplessness, the sporting step, the somersault, the slap and blow of a fist. As the Italian Marinetti had proclaimed: 'poetry is a cruel attack against unknown forces in order to compel them to humble themselves before man.' There was no beauty apart from conflict. There were no masterpieces without aggression. Syntax, the adverb, and punctuation marks were to be abolished. Poetry had to be a continuous succession of images. New images. There were no such things as elegant and vulgar images. Intuition, which assimilates images, knew no privilege, or distinction. The principle of maximum disorder was the sole function of order in a poem. . . .(111)

The significance of this lies in how seriously Nick takes it all, how consuming is his passion, although his ultimate fate implies an eventual disheartening with the object of his faith—he could only, like Owen, go out against "everything" if he no longer believes in anything. And if we look at his last poem this bears witness to the fatalistic darkening of his beliefs, his disenchantment with salvation-through-words, and his cynical acceptance of an inevitable futility:

*My mind grows darker each day
And colder, harder
No seed can grow
My tongue wearies of speech
And is dumb, harsh
Entombed alive
The time to come
Is perpetual night*

*And I am unprepared
 For such prolonged sleep
 But only note how heavy
 My eyelids grow (35)*

This is a far cry from his earlier “lingering optimism” and the “bitter gaiety” with which he writes:

*Come and with rockets
 Fuck existence out of socket
 This stale sky that wrenches out why
 That pale destiny our last significant minute.(105)*

What he resigns himself to, realising that “significant minutes” are illusory, is what Christian has already noted of Nick, that “he was, within the burning bush, cold; within the fiery creation, meaningless. All the roaring significance he heard was a throat sore, a belly empty, a brain thinking it was a brain.” (105) This is not an indictment of Nick, of course; it is an observation of humanity.

What causes Nick’s turn-around in belief is unknown, if indeed it is anything specific, but at some point he must have found the unwelcome, yet irrefutable answer to his question:

*Can wisdom scratch out my itch
 This blatant existence that reeks of sorrow (105)*

It is this answer which brings us to Buddy and an examination of his fate. It is worth noting at this point also that Marechera is closer in identity to his ‘innocent’ artists and thinkers than he is to the cynical and detached ‘chroniclers’ such as Christian, by virtue of the simple fact that Marechera, with disregard for the necessitated sacrificing of emotional and material well-being, insistently continued writing when his works went unappreciated and often unpublished. Marechera believed in the value of his craft, despite all the evidence, and his fleeting knowledge, of its ultimate futility. The idea by which this attitude is justified can be found in Marechera’s poem, “The old man inside me” (Marechera, 1992. 149) where the old man becomes the voice of knowledge, the voice of experience and history which “havoc[s] present illusions.” Those who listen to this voice, who rage against “present illusions”—Nick, Buddy and his friends, and Marechera himself—“fight

certainty with uncertainty,” knowing only that certainty is false and therefore precluding themselves from ever espousing any. They must then, guided by the cynical old man, and without forsaking their intellectual knowledge, risk presenting something uncertain to humanity which is itself bent on discovering certainty, in the hopes of striking a reverberating chord which impresses, instructs and belies, while knowing of course that the activity must ultimately be fruitless with nil benefit to themselves or their species:

The old gambler plays early and late

This game of chance for a pyrrhic memorial.

But the knowledge which circumscribes Buddy’s fate is more than a simple acknowledgement of the futility of this “game of chance”; it is the realisation of how fundamental to the game is the fact that its rules and foundations are arbitrary, and its very being therefore contradictory and hypocritical.

Buddy and his friends are classic Marecherean alienated artists, bohemians and intellectuals, rejecting society and its “present illusions,” and fighting for a “pyrrhic memorial.” These characters are also contextualised more specifically in a Zimbabwean atmosphere, *Mindblast* being written after Marechera’s return to his home country. Buddy’s literary efforts are thwarted by his country’s rejection of his “capitalist” education and his “capitalist poetry” which does not “uplift the people” and, he is told, has “nothing to do with our socialist purposes.” Buddy is thus immediately identified with Nick, and the association is brought home by his protesting “with Mayakovsky that the workers and peasants had to lift themselves to the level of his poems”. (52) When Buddy looks around at his friends he sees many versions of himself: Dr. Grimknife, the classicist, has been suspended from his university job until he agrees to translate Catulus into Shona; Grace, the singer/songwriter, has been exploited by her manager; and Tony, the European-educated sculptor, has been rejected by his society because his work is “not of the people” and is “incomprehensible.” And Buddy, pushing Marechera’s point further, asks: “[w]hy does every revolution result in the alienation of its artists?” (58-59) This question has by now become paradigmatic in Marechera’s fiction, and the characters here border on being caricatures of the individuals whose precarious existences have already raised the question. In this story, however, Marechera uses this familiarity to question the sanctification he has endowed upon his rebel characters.

Buddy's fundamental belief in himself, in his art, in the irrefutable genuineness of his inspiration, is represented by what Grace notes as his "amazing contradictions which others noticed but which he defended." (66) This relates to his "fighting order with disorder," refusing to acknowledge the illogicality of any disorder, whether it arises in himself or his art. However, Buddy suffers from the burgeoning knowledge that in actual fact this refusal of his in itself constitutes a belief in an order—the order of disorder—and even if he ruthlessly and continuously applies disorder to his life and art, this, perhaps disordered, disorder still rests upon and exists by a medium which must be labelled, and consequently ordered—life or art. He cannot perhaps be expected to excuse the fact of his life, but he is aware that he should be able to excuse his art; but he cannot, and he is reminded of this when the young prostitute in the story asks him if he writes about love:

He was amazed at the tenacity with which broken wretched souls hold on to notions of Love and Happiness. How could he tell her it was all a fraud? After all he was guilty himself; his staunch belief in Art regardless of the miserable conditions in which he struggled to light its, perhaps, eternal flame. The things in people's heads and the things not in people's heads were equally weird. (62–63)

This affinity between the irrational beliefs of the society he rejects and his own irrational belief in the sanctity of art, suggest to Buddy the farcical nature of his thankless pursuits. Later in the story Marechera elaborates on this idea: in describing their existences, these characters can refer only to "vague things like genius, spirit, Art. All unreal. That was what hurt, that was the enemy to be kept at bay at all cost." (68) Buddy, it seems, is not keeping the enemy at bay; the knowledge of the unreality of his life's pursuits is becoming more and more obvious to him, threatening his equipoise and undermining his sanity.

When he reads Donna's poetry, then, Buddy is rent by this knowledge bearing down on him. His artistic verdict, that her poems are "no good," (71) is contradicted by the "strange affinity between Donna's and his own poetry." This affinity lies in the fact that both their poems are no more or less than "a shred of identity," if we think of Marechera's poem of that name. (Marechera, 1992, 99) The dominant image of this poem is that which dislocates the idea of a poem, the written words, from what Marechera sees as the actual poem, which is the poet's 'reading' of the

blank page before them. In this sense the genuineness of any poem is unquestionable, and the content of it unknowable; the worth of it, then, is indeterminable. The fact that he presumes to give a verdict is why the verdict is against him, and his belief that he has something valuable to offer, something exclusive, is the evidence which damns him. He can no longer keep the enemy at bay, he has condemned himself and is beyond reprieve; our final look at Buddy, vomiting up his very being, is of not only a shattered artistic vision, but of a shattered, perhaps irreparable, identity:

Thinking—I cared, I cared so much. . . . Christ, this was the Thing, the daemon of his inspiration, the blood-clotting vomit. Thunder rolled, insistent. It boomed in his ears, flashed through his mind that all that had happened had been leading up to this. . . . With a last insistent shriek of defiance, he tried to rise, with all his strength, to rise, denounce, hurl curses to the sky, but his strength failed. Dr Grimknife, banging the door outside, calling to him, heard the loud sickening thud of the poet's fall. (72)

It would be a mistake to think, also, that Marechera is hereby giving credence to Buddy's existence, not in spite of, but because of his tragic vision. Such an argument would suggest that Marechera is implying that if not Buddy's art, then at least his self-destructive and over-analytic impulse, marks him out as a distinct and sympathetic individual, operating at a cruel cost to himself in the vein of admired artists and thinkers throughout human history. However, Marechera is not being so self-indulgent, and the ruthless irony and bathetic melodrama which mocks Buddy (Marechera's 'double') throughout 'his' story is reflected in the poem "Open Window Shirtsleeves" (Marechera, 1992. 75) where we see the recognition that, ultimately, even if one considers the uniqueness of the individual's "moment's fraction of vision," nonetheless "The turning Wheel disdains a Bohemian's Fall."

The final ironic Marecherean perspective I wish to examine in this chapter is found in the character of Otto, as it is presented in the first narrative of "The City Of Anarchists," part two of "The Concentration Camp." The environment here depicted, a uniquely Marecherean image of urban war-time Rhodesia, is, as the title suggests, devoid of order, control or societal 'norms'. The tone of his depiction is Chanderlesque noir, suggesting a seedy lifestyle with a hint of romanticism; but what he depicts is a collection of the most perverse aspects of humanity to be found in any 'decaying' society or milieu:

There were brothels offering little boys and little girls. There were opium dens more decadent than any low visions the depraved mind could imagine. At all hours it was business as usual. Men in female garb roamed the area for clients; women dressed as men paced up and down looking for women to prey on. Small-time gamblers plied their dice on the grubby pavements. Lewd ditties deafened the ear from all sides. Muggers, pickpockets, drunks, army deserters and all those who through some quirk of fate had become habitués of this slimy skid row—they all rubbed shoulders, knifed each other, acted out their nightmares together and, not infrequently, broke out in hysterical riots that would leave everything devastated, snarled and in smoking ruin. . . . None here believed in law and order—it was dog eat dog. You made money even over your dead mother's body. (Marechera, 1994. 139)

This is precisely the society envisioned by the Black Sunlight Organisation in Marechera's earlier novel, where freedom of the individual is axiomatic, where self-preservation is the only requirement, and where the emancipation born of this is the fundamental (if only) beauty which reigns. The carnivalesque imagery is spectacular and surreal; and the very debauchery and decadence itself becomes romantic, as we are drawn into this bizarre but no longer repugnant world through the appreciative eyes of Jimmy the Dwarf:

About two yards to his right, a couple were in the throes of ejaculation. At their feet two little girls dressed in nothing but G-strings were fondling a cackling old degenerate who was squirming luxuriously. Across the alley, a skinhead and a very weird Hell's Angel were lashing at each other with brass knuckles, bicycle chain, a trident, and what looked like a steel wire net. (167)

Otto is the only character out of place in this environment, and yet he is Marechera's double: he has been expelled from university, reads books in bars, and experiences romantic ideals, such as is seen in his vision of "the girl in the white dress." (164) Otto is also, like Marechera, reacting against his society, but that society is anarchistic (the nearest to an ideal Marechera ever purported to advocate) and Otto supports, indeed fights for, a socialist revolution, and his ideals seem ludicrous and naive: "he really believe[s] that shit about class warfare and the inevitability of the

revolution.” (166) Jimmy the Dwarf and Larry Long join Otto in his revolutionary undertakings, but their enthusiasm is fuelled by appropriately mercenary and cynical goals:

But now, with talk of the “revolution” all over the country, Jimmy and Larry had seen the chance to accumulate a tidy nest egg for their old age. Now there were all these foreigners ready to finance a bit of bombing and the odd assassination. The funny thing was: Otto seemed to take the “revolution” at its face value. (165)

Otto is pitifully innocent; and, like others we have seen, he is foolish enough to believe; and the fact that his belief is so seemingly dichotomous to Marechera’s brings home to us the actual affinity between these two. Marechera suggests, that is, that his own impulse to rebel and reject is not the romanticised belief in disorder he proclaims but, in fact, nothing more than an impulse to rebel and reject, whatever one is rebelling against. The implication, then, is that in Otto’s position Marechera (or Nick or Chris or Susan . . .) would preach the same embarrassing theoretical Marxism and be found, like Otto, “talking seriously about the rights, the fundamental rights, of living things.” (166) Even Fay Weldon’s Eleanor Darcy has realised that “[t]here is no such thing as a ‘right’ to anything: Right to Life, Right to Choose, Right to Housing, Right to Orgasm—all it means is ‘it would be nice if only’,” (85) and she happily designs her utopia around the fundamental, and equal, non-rights of every living thing. Darcy, like Buddy, is “that conservative of conservatives who is an extreme individualist,” (Marechera, 1984. 63) and therefore does not presume to speak on behalf of all individuals. She speaks only on behalf of herself, and advocates her desires for society which she thinks can be reconciled with others’ desires. This does of course allow her to justify restricting people’s freedom—guns will not be allowed in her utopia for instance (173)—and the presentation of her ideal society is not an altogether sympathetic one, open as it is to corruption and perversion, seen in Hugo’s commandments and his evangelical preaching of Darcyism at the end of the novel. (234)

Otto, on the other hand, does presume to speak on behalf of people, and not only is this fascistic in itself, but it endows upon him an earnestness which is his own undoing: he expects others to share his vision, is angered when they do not, and cannot even allow himself the pleasure of relishing his vision of “the girl in a

white dress." Instead, like any dutiful undergraduate, he theorises her:

'But she does not belong to the revolution,' he said a little sadly. 'She is only a sympathiser. Only a rich middle class princess going through a tantrum of rebellion against her parents. And only against her parents. So I say she is beautiful because that is the truth. But it is also true that even though she will help me I know she is part of the problem we are trying to eliminate.'

Larry Long leaned forward, leering. 'You could just fuck her though.'

Otto bit his lower lip and chewed. 'That shows me, Larry, that you did not read my last pamphlet-but-one on the alliance between women's liberation and the revolutionary struggle.' He paused, biting his fingernail, he banged the table with his fist. 'DID YOU!' (167)

Otto's earnestness, however, is in essence no different, as we have seen, to the earnestness and passion with which Marechera's anarchistic characters, trapped in a 'conventional' society, pursue their own arbitrary visions. This, in a sense, is Marechera's most telling self-parody or self-condemnation. With no real sympathy for Otto, we see him as a ridiculous figure, dreaming on an impossible goal, and impotently attempting to apply theory to 'reality'. What disturbs us, however, is the concomitant knowledge that it is thus demanded that we see Marechera and his anarchic characters in an identical light.

This equality of negative capability and negative significance are to become familiar throughout this thesis, as we look into Marechera's more philosophical investigations of character, identity and meaning. The relationships between characters we have examined here represent a mere step into the complexities of identity existing in Marechera's works, and what we shall examine in the next two chapters is how these identities construct themselves in terms of political and theoretical ideologies, fundamental to each character, which do not necessarily see the light of day through overt actions, but rather through psychical processes. We shall also investigate in more depth the paradox which has been revealed here in characters such as Craig, Nick and Buddy, whereby the cynical individual, against their own better judgement, is forced to justify an acceptance of themselves and their own irrational impulses and beliefs, in a hypocritical betrayal of their own cynicism. This will lead us ultimately to a more detailed analysis of Marechera's only solution to this

dialectic, which we have examined briefly in this chapter: a universal respect and empathy for all individuals' "tortured dreams," arbitrary as these must be, which emphasises not the ubiquity of negative capability, but rather celebrates the equality of paradoxically tragic human subjectivity.

Chapter 3

Victims of a Myth (OR: The Great Cock)

Robin: GET UP, SLUT. It's all one with me whether you want it or not—you're still going to get it, and get it good—you'll never forget me even after you're dead. That's what we want to do to the whole country. We'll screw the ancestors out of you; screw Mwari out of you, and your God will be the Big White Cock!

Dambudzo Marechera
(The Alley)

As one judge said to another: 'Be just and if you can't be just, be arbitrary.'

William S. Burroughs *(Naked Lunch)*

What we have witnessed in the previous chapter—Marechera's distortion of his own autobiographical and fictional self, in turn distorting his autonomous fictional creations, and bringing into play a visceral disunity which confounds and yet subtly informs the reading process—calls to mind Wilson Harris's evocation of “carnival twinships” in his profound critical work, *The Womb Of Space*. I have throughout shied from overstepping the necessary constraints which this analysis, and Marechera himself, place upon my investigation, in terms of deriving ‘truths’ of Marechera's world from the style in which he presents it. That is, rather than moving from observation to conclusion, the nature of my observations dictate that I move from observation to observation, compelling this exploration to move seemingly forward

but towards no endpoint, and perhaps merely randomly within an amorphous infinity. This is the essence of Harris's significance.

Harris supports my endeavors through his belief that art's potential lies in its ability to render fissures within perceived, paradoxical, totality which sustains its "mask of universality" through "patterns of elegant tautology." (17) He claims that

objective status is eternally flawed, eternally aware of breached limits, eternally susceptible therefore to an organ of wholeness *that is never achieved* (or identified permanently in nature or in psyche) but is paradoxically there nevertheless at the heart of creation in which pressures of dialogue, spheres of duality, exist between creator and created. (5) [Italics mine]

The ephemerality of these "pressures of dialogue" is their defining and fundamental feature; they are in a sense a 'hint' into the vast, unperceivable unknown which is the Universe existing beyond or without constructed human preconceptions. This is an infinity which Harris defines as "asymmetrical," thereby thwarting any conceptualization of it based on 'known' geometrical or theoretical extrapolations. Harris wishes, therefore, to evoke the "asymmetry within the infinity and genius of art" which fleetingly seduces us through "the complex interactions of partial images as these disclose themselves subject to untamed and untamable resources within, yet beyond, daylight capture or framework." (17) This, I believe, is what we have found operating to date in Marechera's texts.

Our investigation has concentrated upon the infinity of character which Marechera evokes through his disruption of the mask of totality which purports to define a totality of subject, a totality of being. In these terms Harris investigates the indefatigable operations of his "partial images" through "carnival twinships" which "gleam with asymmetric fissures of myth" (19) by their subtle undermining of a constructed false totality which, in its ultimate state, becomes utterly univocal in its hegemony and thereby represents the framework for "carnival tragedy," the tragedy of unchallenged totality, the tragedy of "the hollow mask humanity wears with a semblance of dignity." (18) This mask, in all its vulgarity, becomes, paradoxically, the vehicle for asymmetric insight through its intuitively absurd ubiquity. That is, it becomes a shared mask, donned by all characters existing within this system of identity which is dictated by a systemized structure of existence. Each such character lives in a state of enforced twinship with each other such character, and as this twinship is

realised, by a symbolic passing of the mask, these characters themselves become, momentarily, the partial images which disrupt the illusion of universality in which they are trapped. As Harris puts it: “[f]atally tainted mask, yet miraculous fissure or arbitrating insight, remains in each bleak step from twinship to twinship.” (20) Again, this is what we have seen in Marechera: desperate, frantic insight into infinite subjective existence which must of necessity be confined, concomitant with its revelation, within the constructs of totality from which it has intuitively flown—the constructs of language and communication, of culture and tradition, of expectation and assumption.

The ostensible primary symbol of power, and thereby object of pillory, in Marechera’s works comes in the form of political or military leaders or governments who dictate to society and who are invariably corrupt and self-serving. Theirs is a mask of absolute power which, because of and by that power, defines itself as absolute right, absolute truth—this is perhaps one of the less elegant tautologies to which Harris refers. Marechera shifts this mask through time and geography, implicating not just colonial or neo-colonial regimes, but any which oppress, dictate or abuse their people. The implication is that which the nameless character in *The Black Insider* articulates when he compares postcolonial Africa to Nazi Germany, which he has just been discussing:

We now do the same thing; we raise the African image to fly in the face of the wind and cannot see the actual living blacks having their heads smashed open with hammers in Kampala. We have done such a good advertising job and public relations stunt with our African image that all horrors committed under its lips merely reinforce our admiration for the new clothes we acquired with independence. (84)

However, Marechera does not create in this group an exclusive network of privileged oppressors. When dealing with “all the oppressions that are done under the sun,” (Marechera, 1990. 27) one moves into the almost theoretical realm of the psychology and conditions of oppression, as well as being overwhelmed by its ubiquity. Thus Marechera investigates social, domestic and ideological oppressions in the same light as he has looked at more overt examples, placing the mask also onto these ‘small time’ oppressors and implicating them with an equal vehemence. This

These leaders are also metonymically identified through the armies and police forces they implement and whose violence they sanctify. Here the brutality is real and Marechera depicts in various harrowing scenes the extent of this violence, both physical and psychological. Rix, the reorientation officer in “Grimknife Jr’s Story,” is a fine example of an oppressive pawn in the game of societal oppression who willingly acts to his leaders’ demands for a society of imposed homogeneity. Like Gletkin in Arthur Koestler’s novel, *Darkness at Noon*, Rix is not interested in intellectual thought or even concerned by the utter illogicality of his logic when it is examined from outside the narrow axiomatic basis upon which it rests: a fascist description of an ideal society. Marechera’s bitter irony is not subtle: Rix claims that “honest citizens only think what they are told. They don’t think for themselves;” and he believes that “reason” is “[w]hat I tell you.” (47) This kind of concrete oppressiveness, mindlessly ironic, can be witnessed again, later in the same story, when we learn of Rita’s efforts to start a “Street Theatre” and the subsequent arrest of the group:

Apparently there was a law about street gatherings for political ends and it was no use trying to explain that the street theatre group had only artistic ends. The desk sergeant had let her “explain” what street theatre was and when she had finished he had calmly spat just inches to the right of her head, scowled, “Think you’re still in Rhodesia, eh? Constable, lock them up.”

The irony here is that Rita, being white, is treated with bitter discrimination and we are given every reason to believe, appropriately ignoring the irrelevant inversion of race-relations, that, to all intents and purposes, this is indeed Rhodesia—racist, oppressive and undemocratic. Dotted throughout Marechera’s work we also find instances of actual violence committed by these representatives of the state. In *House of Hunger*, for instance, the narrator is viciously beaten by police who want “information.” (57) And in “The Concentration Camp” the Makoni and Murehwa families and their fellow prisoners are victims of beatings, rapes and humiliation. The absolute power possessed by the soldiers renders any resistance to this “fearful face of law and order” (160) impotent, and the victims are “reduced into a surly acceptance of futility.” (162) Violence is simply violence, however, and for our purposes it is more significant to follow in detail not the violence itself as it is captured

by its “photographic chronicler,” but rather to examine the movement of the lens as it spans the spectrum of such violence. As Mark Stein has noted, the state, as Marechera views it, achieves its authoritarian and oppressive solidity through mental as well as physical control. (Stein, 1995) Marechera relates the false moral, ideological or political totalities of oppressive governments, and the regimes by which they enforce these hegemonies, to other more generalised and less overt beliefs or systems of belief which operate in society and which dictate ways of thinking, seeing, feeling or believing; such institutions as the church, school, university, and even seemingly irrelevant structures such as personal relations, come under his scrutiny. The narrator of *The Black Insider* notes this in regard to his image of political and ideological dictatorship; the emperor’s new clothes. This rationalization of power, society is forced to acknowledge in all its splendour; however, society is implicated in the process:

The art of the invisible demands many tailors: teachers, lecturers, jurists, scientists, stockbrokers, administrators, and government cabinets, they all assist in creating the wonder-garment of institutions, traditions, precedents, laws, which the long line of citizens will cheer as soon as the emperor or president emerges out in the open to show his new clothes. (53)

We can witness this relationship hinted at in *Black Sunlight* when, in describing the riot at the university, Christian tells us that the soldiers wanted to teach the students a “lesson.” (31) The suggested affinity between this lesson and the lessons of the lecture theatre builds upon the similar image which Marechera invokes earlier in the novel in relation to university’s intellectual co-oppressor, school:

A truckload of soldiers roared past. All their intentions were left hanging like dust over the asphalt long after they had gone. *They were there in the classroom with us*, marshalling facts, categorizing, reciting, and absorbing the knowledge handed down through the ages. *All these meanings that had a hard and unyielding face!* How did one escape? In a rain of bullets? Or seeing red everywhere until the straitjacket came? (21) [Italics mine]

A similar juxtaposition can be found in “Grimknife Jr’s Story” when Buddy is in jail thinking of “the Man in the office,” “the police sneering at his poems,” and “[t]he army officer saying with a leer, ‘We can make you disappear,’ clicking his fingers, ‘Just like *that*. See?’” It is significant that these people make Buddy

tremble “not from fear but from the way they seemed to think they knew what they were doing”—it is not their immediate power over him that concerns Buddy, but that they represent the indefatigable human characteristic of egoism, believing irrationally that their own view must by definition be ‘right’. And so this image of governmental control, as before, evokes an image of social, ideological dictatorship:

And he would see other policemen, but this time dressed up in cassocks, exhorting him to savour knowledge for its own sake rather than for worldly ambition. Teaching him the love of Christ with wafer-thin words and a teaspoonful of South African wine. (54)

Marechera later informs us more clearly of this affinity he sees between social, political and theoretical ideologies, whereby the mask of supposed absolute knowledge or absolute moral impunity (however ironic that may be in ‘reality’) slips between these different viewpoints causing each to implicate the other and them all to implicate themselves:

In form six and at university, Thomas Hardy and his talk of a blind, fumbling god, good intentioned perhaps but still totally useless, real people down there dying/suffering from his inadequate vision. And the communist manifesto was saying religion was the opium of the people. Political ideologies were sneering at the back of my mind. I turned to them only to find them equally shit. Talk of organising human beings always reminds me of jail. I turned to friendships—and discovered the covert and overt betrayal that underlines all relationships. (130–131)

The point is that even the most ‘good intentioned’ of humanitarian beliefs is necessarily flawed because, as we found with Otto’s idealism, it presumes to be endowed with sufficient objectivity to speak on behalf of all humanity. This requires the construction of a false totality—a theoretical humanity or a theoretical utopia—which by this flawed premise is destined to at best fail or, more likely, become corrupt; and certainly to conflict with other supposed totalities. Wilson Harris describes it thus:

the innocent may ... suffer at times less from tragic fate and more from a lust for symmetry, by underpinning localities of hubris to polarise cultures into “universal” camps that have no alternative but to articulate the death of others ... in the response of one universal hierarchy to another. (18–19)

In Marechera these hierarchies can, as we have seen, exist on any level of society and they can also be ensconced purely within one individual, within the egoistic “universal” subject. This can be a leader or dictator, such as we have seen above, or it can be any individual within society, and Marechera, true to the form we have examined in the preceding chapter, implicates himself amongst this society of universe builders:

There are these crazy guys, he said, you know like Idi Amin who really believe what they’re doing, what they’re saying. I nodded solemnly. There are a lot of guys right here who’ve got the maddest notions in the world and each day all they are waiting for is to act out their weird descriptions. Just like I am doing. (Marechera, 1984. 146)

As I have said, Marechera imagistically views the society he presents in terms of its patriarchal nature and represents this by exposing masculine domination of women through sexual possession and violence. Thus, as well as using sexual violence as a vehicle for specifically examining the male/female dynamic of this society, Marechera also provides with it an image of the enforcement of one individual’s universe upon another. As Musaemura Zimunya notes (100), in *House of Hunger* Peter’s masturbation (48–49) “symbolizes the community’s emphasis on phallic power,” and Peter’s sexual prowess throughout gives him the identity of the archetypal, sexually dominant African man. In this sense he represents the patriarchy, but his role is not merely metonymic; he also carries an identity of his own, and wherever that may have come from, it is still, as far as he is concerned, his. Thus, when he beats up Immaculate or “screw[s] her underneath the table” (4; 27) he is not only playing the bad guy in a piece of sociological documentation, he is acting out *his* “weird descriptions,” he is (literally) attempting to force an alternative universe (Immaculate’s) to acquiesce to his, to define and sanctify his. The same can be said of the men who “believed that if one did not beat up one’s wife it meant that one did not love her” and who carry out these beatings publicly, as a testimony to the power of their sexually violent universe:

The most lively of them ended with the husband actually fucking—raping—his wife right there in the thick of the excited crowd. He was cursing all women to hell as he did so. And he seemed to screw her forever—he went on and on and on and on until she looked like death. When at last—the

crowd licked its lips and swallowed—when at last he pulled his penis out of her raw thing and stuffed it back into his trousers, I think she seemed to move a finger, which made us all wonder how she could have survived such a determined assault. (49–50)

Another aspect of this sexual dominancy can be seen through the experiences of adolescent sisters Debbie and Violet in their interactions with their ‘boyfriends’ in “When Rainwords Spit Fire.” Johnny wants Debbie to be “his girl” and she observes that her lifetime friend is no longer seeing her as a friend but as an object, as “the woman she would be” and he is “asking her something, not as he had always done but in a way that had nothing to do with her person.” And when Debbie is reticent in her (perhaps inevitable) acquiescence, Johnny becomes violent, “twisting her arm and snarling.” (137–138) This violence, and its impact on its victim, is borne out later in Debbie’s dream where again Marechera evokes an image of military presence along with sexual oppression:

What was that last thought, like the sound of distant gunfire? Yes, why was Johnny so changed? She was fast asleep. *Let go! Johnny let go.* She turned fierce eyes on him. But even as she watched, Johnny quickly changed into a spitting snarling cobra, the luminous green hood as wide as the winter night. The long needle-point fangs obscenely protruded from the night’s black gums. *No! Johnny no!* (149) [Italics Marechera’s]

And Violet thinks of Jim thus:

like Johnny, he only wanted one thing and he would not get that until after the wedding. She did not want to lose him. She thought of him as her boyfriend, indeed loved him in her own strange way. Maybe... What if he got it from another girl? He had even hinted as much but had later said he had only been joking. That’s what I don’t get, how can they *joke* about it. A subtle cruelty, a veiled threat. (144) [Ellipsis and italics Marechera’s]

It is interesting, in this context, to also look briefly at Marechera’s poem “Job’s Nitespot” (Marechera, 1992. 111) where the speaker rejects a girl’s offer of sex, and thereby rejects the role of the amorous dominator which his society has constructed for him. The implication is that it is really the latter rejection which has “insulted” the girl, and it is for this that the speaker is concerned that he will be beaten up. The political overtone of this very social situation is provided by Marechera’s

emphasis of the word “comrade” in describing the friends of the “tough guy” who he now fears. Through this Marechera implies his dislike of the political regime in Zimbabwe, where ‘comrades’ are really thugs, and he also suggests that these particular thugs are acting for society in punishing him for his rejection of society. They, like Peter, of course possess agency, but they are also, like Peter, wearing the mask of their society and the mask of their leaders.

In Marechera’s plays we can also find a direct link between domestic and social domination and authoritarianism, and their corollaries existing on a political level. Spotty from “The Coup” and “The Gap” is a politically impotent, but expedient and nasty character who is described by his son, Dick, as a “white fascist” and who tells Dick that there is “no place for thought in Africa,” (25) which is echoed by Betsy in “The Breakdown Scrapiron Blues” when she instructs her daughter Noma: “You are not to say what you think.” (49) The sexual aspect of this domestic rendering of societal attitudes can be seen when Drake, who appears, in various guises, in many of the plays and who is a politically corrupt and cynical, but nonetheless charming, character, passionately kisses Noma, his daughter, and then calls her a “bitch” and a “filthy slut.” (58-59) This recalls Susan’s account, in *Black Sunlight*, of being called a “conniving cunt” by her father after having sex with him. (50)

Masks of totality, however, are not worn merely by characters representing a political or ideological status quo. As Harris has pointed out, ‘victims’ can also adopt a belief in a universal ‘truth’; and they usually do, whether it be Marxism, fascism or any other private or public theory on existence. Thus Marechera does not shy from implicating his sympathetic characters in the crime of assuming a belief in a totality and an identity thereby constructed. In an odd, seemingly superfluous or redundant passage near the beginning of *Black Sunlight*, Christian (or at least a first person narrator who we must believe is Christian) describes a scene which provides an important insight into Marechera’s attitudes towards his characters. (5-6) Given an explicit Zimbabwean setting (Christian is eating sadza), we meet Susan raising money through prostitution; money which she gives to Christian who is at the time “eating the proceeds from her last but one client.” Despite this charity, however, Christian is obnoxious enough to reply to Susan, when she chastises him for reading as he eats: “It was the only way to shut out the sound of the mattress.”

In addition to this revelation of Christian’s identity with patriarchal attitudes

of disrespect towards, yet use of, women, it is significant that during this scene he is engrossed in James Hadley Chase's novel, *No Orchids For Miss Blandish*. This novel is characterised by its voyeuristic portrayal of psychosexual abuse of women, represented by the hapless Miss Blandish. From the beginning of the novel Miss Blandish is characterised solely in terms of men's perceptions of her sexual attractiveness. We never learn her first name, we have barely any exposure to her thoughts, and her suicide at the end of the novel is merely the necessary outcome of her pathetic existence: her father, Eddie and Fenner all think she would be "better off dead," and this desire is also one of the few thoughts of Miss Blandish's that Chase privileges us with knowing prior to it becoming obvious. (144, 58, 145, 57, 150) The fact that the men ogling Miss Blandish are also the men kidnapping her adds further discomfort to the reader, and her lack of response against these men, indeed the hints at her attraction to them (particularly Eddie) give the novel a further perverse streak. Witness for instance the following scene, taking place shortly after the kidnapping:

Miss Blandish was pushed into the hard light of the overhead lamp. Two pads of cotton-wool were strapped across her eyes with adhesive tape. Eddie supported her. *She leaned heavily against him. His hand on her arm felt hard and warm. It was her only contact in the darkness.* (35) [Italics mine]

As if being kidnapped by the vicious Grisson mob, headed by the cruel and grotesque Ma Grisson, is not enough for Miss Blandish, the psychotic Slim Grisson takes a liking to her and decides: "I want to keep her, ma." So Miss Blandish gets locked in a room, drugged, and subjected to Slim's deranged fancy. However, Chase gives this a further perverse streak by having Slim initially not touch her, but only stand by her bed drawling incoherently. Finally, in despair and in one of her few displays of emotion, it is Miss Blandish who cries out: "I wish he would do something to me." (57)

To identify Christian with this kind of literature is a coup for Marechera. By placing himself within a tradition of misogynistic, power-based sexuality, Christian not only becomes vaguely repulsive to us, but he is also identified with the patriarchal mask of phallic oppressiveness which, throughout the rest of the novel, he is apparently fighting. Obviously the implication is not that Christian is 'one

of them' in strictly political or ideological terms, but rather that, like the government/society/patriarchy he opposes, he is wearing a mask of totality which has the potential to be oppressive and lethal. Essentially, in metonymic terms, Christian is a patriarchal oppressor of women because he is certainly a potential oppressor of something.

This relates to Marechera's ironic naming of Blanche Goodfather—'the white, paternal, altruistic benefactor'. This character is obviously not male, and she is not a colonialist missionary or philanthropist. Nonetheless, she has the mark of 'anthropologist' on her and, for the purposes of the novel, she wears the appropriate mask—the mask of intellectual totality and academic 'truth', which is in fact no more than a destructive passion to "ferret out the few bits and pieces of authentic people reducing them to meticulous combinations of the English alphabet." (4) And Christian is also identified with this: "When I came out into the sun *I bumped into myself* coming to explain and explain all over again. 'Sorry,' I said to the woman I had knocked down. *It was Blanche Goodfather.*" (75) [Italics mine] This, as well as the fact that Christian has a relationship with Goodfather, draws him, like before, not into a direct identification with Blanche's mask but into identification through the fact that she, like he, wears a mask, a mask of a world view which defines itself as universal. And, as we shall see, even if that world view is one of anti-universalism, the mask, by necessity of the view, must still exist.

Marechera's male protagonists are unequivocal in their rejection of the patriarchal world we have just been discussing; however, they are also plagued by an awareness that they are always, to some extent, complicit in its functioning, and they are also conscious that their points of view are no more reliable than their society's; that, fundamentally, they cannot defend their own position nor fundamentally debunk another's. Susan, who suffers the same theoretical malady but chooses to arbitrarily (and quite justifiably) ignore it, articulates the paradox thus: "[p]ersonally I detest all thought of sex between old men and little girls though of course I have no rational case to state against it." (Marechera, 1980. 44)

The narrator of *The Black Insider* views the hegemony of the state or society in terms of thought and language, suggesting that these insidiously subsume themselves within the individual's consciousness, dictating world-view and creating a false homogeneity within a given culture. As we have seen, this homogeneity is

viewed imagistically as “the emperor’s new clothes,” an illusion which invulnerably pervades society and which is described by the narrator thus: “[a]part from such ectoparasites as bugs, . . . there are endoparasites which actually live permanently in our minds. The latter are also known collectively as ‘culture’, ‘tradition’, ‘history’ or ‘civilisation’.” (Marechera, 1990. 33) He further relates this to the cult of logic which reduces human impulses to an analysis based on the “tyranny of straightforward things” (37) which forms the basis of political thought and ideology. Such ideology, however, is of necessity ultimately reduced to a dialectic impasse either where it confronts a conflicting ideology, also based on a flawed ‘logic’ and also masquerading as universal, or where it is refuted by the simple facts of the human imagination and the multifarity of human perspective. This can be seen in simplistic but telling terms through Marechera’s use of an arithmetical analogy. In *The Black Insider* the narrator ironically states that “[o]ne plus one equals two is so irrefutably straightforward that the unborn child can see that even if man was wiped off the face of the earth one plus one would forever and always equal two.” In “Grimknife Jr’s Story” we see the counter-argument to this rationality when Grimknife Jr tells Rix that in fact “one plus one is a pregnant girl who lived in Moscow at the time of Ivan the Terrible.” In actual fact, anything can ‘mean’ anything or ‘prove’ anything when it is taken outside its axiomatic basis. Language’s axiomatic basis is a mercurial and indefinable precedent which is wholly arbitrary in nature and from which language itself is implicitly removed whenever it is used. Thus, meaning is never reliable and no interpretation is more ‘right’ than any other.

This pertains to more than just language however, and it impinges upon anything which language presumes to describe. As we have seen, the narrator of *The Black Insider* views all aspects of culture in this light and is left with an overwhelming cynicism about human society and human endeavour. He shares this cynicism with the nameless character in the novel who, like him, despite the agony, both mental and physical, he has suffered at the hands of one regime or another, has not the faith to turn to any other constructed and institutionalized world-view and so remains trapped in metaphysical or ideological atheism. He does not relish this position necessarily but it is all that is open to him. In the following monologue he regrets the failure of political ideologies which humanity has bypassed in its tragic rush through history, he pays tribute to the minds that have been hereby destroyed, he

salutes art and artists which futilely rage against the 'progress' of the species, and he personifies history as a cruel disciplinarian who causes suffering and pain to those who refuse to acquiesce to its random demands and shrink in apology for their own existence:

We should have turned at that corner where the crucified man pointed the way. At that corner where Chaka washed his hands in blood. At that corner where the road to Kampala leads to Buchenwald. At that corner where black learned men in disgrace sink their differences with the rest. But we will drive through the independent countries where lucid minds shatter through thick windscreens. Where original thoughts veer and crash into ancient lamp-posts. Where promising youths are driven to drink cynical toasts while you and I clap with one hand the praises of the human traffic. We should have gone the other way; with Hieronymus Bosch scrawled massacre nightmares on the Coca-Cola billboards; with Dylan Thomas written states of mind that crack mountains; with Soyinka drawn typewritten portraits of madness rooted in sanity in the Africa hereafter. I should have turned at that corner where history moulders in grimy basement rooms. Because the blow to my jaw did not solve his problem. He broke the chair on my shoulders and stood back to observe how even this did not solve anything. Not once had I moved toward the savage penitence which would have released both of us from the crude scenario. I had been beaten up before for not behaving like people wanted me to, especially not expressing appreciation or gratitude and sat there, eyes open, seeing nothing. (74)

It is this tendency to "reject everything and everybody" (74) which casts this character and his Marecherean doubles out of society almost completely. They do not protest in an institutionalized sense yet they condemn everything around them. Christian articulates the process early in *Black Sunlight* when describing his home-life as a child. In the tense environment of the house, he tells us, he "would rain" (19); he would protest in his mind against his own existence and he would hate all those around him, lashing out with psychological daggers. But the rain eventually stopped, after "the incident of the underpants," and Christian had "slunk about under the skirts of the sky seeing indecencies everywhere." (29) This represents a rite of passage to cynicism where the mind stops protesting and detaches itself from

its environment, from its species; like Harold, Christian is learning to “give up on people.”

It is this detachment which provides the mask of totality which these characters wear. It is, for Christian, the mask of the “photographic chronicler” who takes no part in, is not affected by, society and all its oppressions. It also relates to “House of Hunger” and the narrator’s “disinterested intervention” which he describes as a “moral experiment” (7); this brings us back to another rendering of the idea, also in *Black Sunlight*, which Stephen calls “the basic experiment”: the ability to “divorce one’s feelings from the object of their attention.” (28) It is this basic experiment which allows Christian to calmly photograph the insanity of the riot at the university, claiming that “[t]hrough the camera lens the whole thing writhed like a jackal biting through its own trapped leg,” but remaining unmoved and proudly announcing that “I had actually become the camera itself, shooting the human spectacle before me.” (32)

A further function of this mask of detachment is its role in absolving the characters from being implicated in any part of what they are witnessing. As we have seen, the very fact of them wearing such a mask implies an affinity with the political structures they reject; and further to this, fissures in the mask itself reveal irrational impulses toward active destruction. The word “shooting” in the above quote is perhaps not coincidental, and after seeing Marie trapped in the crowd Christian loses his detachment altogether and becomes one of the many violent participants: “I felt nothing but a cold and intent murderousness.” The mask is thus an intellectual refuge from the guilt of association with the constructs of violence and oppression which pervade irrational beliefs or desires. The idea is put across more emphatically in the “Appendix” to *Mindblast* when Marechera is relating his encounter with a down-and-out white woman who offers herself to him for a mere fifty cents.

I looked at her, and my body rose to the direct sexual perversions possible. I had read all of de Sade and knew that there were times I was in a red-hot manner physically attracted, voluptuously directed towards utter helpless, utter female misery. Misery and despair, when it is female, can make a man pounce on it. Veni, vidi, vici. Ah that caesarean of the pregnant brain! South Africa fucking Maseru. Or the Israelis sodomizing the Palestinians in Beirut. Or the Nazis scewing the shit out of the rest of Europe. Making me

think of the gun-culture that is now a permanent feature of my country. . . .
 I thought of the diseases she was probably carrying between her muddied
 knees. It gave me a sudden erection. I could have vomited, there and then
 the vomit of devastating self-knowledge. (153)

Here Marechera not only reaffirms the political-sexual relationship we have been discussing, and implicates himself within this, but he also goes on to indicate how his role as a dispassionate chronicler provides him with a sanctuary from this “devastating self-knowledge”: “‘I don’t have time,’ I said gently, indicating the typewriter. ‘I’ve got to finish this as soon as possible.’” Marechera can hide behind this mask of ‘writer’ and even if seeing “indecencies everywhere” means also seeing them in himself, as long as he can hurriedly write these down, as he does upon the pages we are reading, he can obfuscate his own self-condemnation.

Huma Ibrahim, in her analysis of *Black Sunlight*, notes the fissure in Christian’s mask when he finds himself partaking of the discourse of the world he has ostensibly rejected. Ibrahim (88) reminds us of Susan’s perspicacious comment to Christian which underlines his contradiction: “[h]ow can you feel guilty about Marie when, as a photographic chronicler, you don’t feel anything about the institutionalized violence out there?” (44) Ibrahim goes on to define the inertia of Christian’s role as a “collective decadence” which he shares with Chris and Nick, and says that his “collaboration in the betrayal of the ‘black heroes’ is implicit, and it is this that he cannot forgive himself for.” (89)¹

Christian is certainly aware of the contradictions inherent in his existence and, as we saw with Marechera above, it is important for him to record these in his chronicle. In this way he can distance himself from his own violations of logic and the indefensibility of his own existence, just as he has done with society. This is the only rational recourse for one who “will not believe either his senses or his mind” (Marechera, 1978. 71) because s/he is aware that “[w]hat we see, being our

¹This is a pertinent observation into Christian’s psyche, but it is a mistake of Ibrahim’s, I believe, to implicate Nick and Chris along with it; and it arises from Ibrahim’s insistence upon dividing Marechera’s characters into gender-camps. I shall discuss this in more detail later, but while Marechera’s characters are nearly all implicated in the crime of assuming masks of totality, these masks are not necessarily congruent with gender. Nick, as we have seen, has an undying faith in his art which he sees as “revolutionary” (111) rather than as a chronicle; and Chris represents perverse political extremism. Both of these beliefs run counter to Christian’s cynicism which, as we have seen, is the basis for his position as “chronicler.”

sight, has no objectivity.” (Marechera, 1990. 32) Of course this denies the very basis of rationality and refutes the idea of ‘rational recourse’ which is something of which Marechera’s chroniclers are painfully aware: in *The Black Insider* the narrator assures us that “such of what we know of as real life is limited within the thin thread of colour in which we have positioned ourselves in the spectra of the universe” (47); and in *Black Sunlight* we are assured that “[t]here [is] no immortal ore anywhere in the rock of the intellect [and] [n]either is it there in the coalface of the emotions.” And, indeed, both narrators tell us that

the thoughts that control our feelings [are] not those of where straightlines come from nor where they go. There [is] no centre either, no circumference, but as it were spiralling nebulae, galaxies beyond galaxies, exploding wildly outward, hurtling away towards the incredible infinite that [lies] beyond the boundaries in which we . . . linger. (Marechera, 1980. 108; Marechera, 1990. 103)

They attempt, as I have said, to circumvent this lack of faith in their own viewpoints by chronicling, as in the above quotes, their own hypocrisy along with society’s. They cannot apostatize their dedication to chronicling because it would leave them with nothing but their bitter cynicism and no excuse to go on living. Conversely, they need this excuse because they do go on living, perhaps irrationally, and so the rationalisation they conjure for their life (their occupations as chroniclers) comes retrospectively, responding to an unfathomable fact, and is in this sense rational. However, it is also the case that *any* rationalisation of an unfathomable fact is in the same sense rational, and these protagonists hover therefore between empathy for those they otherwise condemn, and the self-condemnation implicit in the act of general condemnation. The narrator of *The Black Insider* puts it thus:

I can never look a rational thought straight in the eye. Hate me if you wish, but not too offensively. And there I was yesterday hammering the typewriter keys with a worldliness not of this world. Thoughts like claws must be sheathed. Something always happens to show us how really blind we are. This is not only stranger than we imagine but stranger than we can imagine. We cannot all afford the luxury of self-disgust but someone has to do the dirty work. That means—me. (38)

As Susan, fully aware of the irrational indefensibility of her beliefs, chooses to

act arbitrarily to those beliefs, so the chroniclers, faced with the eternal knowledge of their own hypocrisy, choose also to accept an indefensible position, pragmatically asserting their need to be *something*. As the narrator admits in *The Black Insider*: “[w]riting has made me the worst kind of hypocrite—an honest one.” (57) We can see this, for instance, in “House of Hunger” where the narrator is happy to tell us of the precariousness of his belief in his “disinterested intervention,” admitting that the action comes first, followed by the necessary justification: “My disinterested intervention—that’s how I put it to myself.” (6) This is also how he puts it to us but, unlike him, we do not have the need to justify his actions and so we dispassionately judge him for his hypocrisy and choose to either condemn or empathise with his honesty. Despite the fissures that must necessarily undercut their position, the chroniclers and conductors of “the basic experiment” choose to maintain this position in a bid to protect their own sanity. On the other hand, they can relax this ‘fundamental’ state at any time, choosing to do so when they do not require its protection. At such times they also reveal their inner cynicism regarding it, and expose it to the reader for the fraudulent mask that it is. For instance, when Christian is riding in the car with Susan she begins to film him with his photographic equipment. This is a frivolous ‘investigation’ into Christian’s psyche, testing his ability to detach himself from what is going on around him and even happening to him. And in this ‘playful’ context Christian feels confident to reveal his ‘true’ self:

She began to shoot me. I could hear the film whirring. I could hear her fidgeting about changing the angle from time to time. I could not keep it up, that mask of impassivity. I grinned.

She tired of it, that basic experiment. (49)

Again the word “shoot” implies the violence of the camera, but here Christian is the victim rather than the perpetrator of the subtle violence of the basic experiment. But he nonetheless attempts to apply the impassivity of the photographic chronicler to his new identity as *chronicled*, turning a blind eye to his own ‘oppression’ and recording only the sounds of Susan’s *chronicling*. This passage also implies that oppression inflicted by the mask of totality worn by the photographic chronicler need not be felt by its victim as a violation of their freedom or a violence against their being. Rather, it is made light of, implicating again the victim in their own oppression.

Their "mask of impassivity" is, however, the necessary protection for the chronicler in their general exposure to violence as it brutally exists throughout the spectrum of human operations. As Christian notes: "[t]hose cameras, that typewriter, they were the speck between myself and the full pulsing blaze of the sun." (78) The sun is the omnipresent power acting upon the earth which is metaphorically also that of hegemonic totality which confines and oppresses people within its own system of perception. There is no escape from the sun and, as we shall see, even if it is anarchically inverted to give off a black radiance this does not deny its strength or influence, it merely restructures the nature of its eternal influence.

To be impassive, then, and to shield oneself beneath that impassivity, is the only protection from this burning obscenity for one whose self-appointed duty it is to witness the ubiquitous violence of society, to witness "all the oppressions that are done under the sun." Thus, when asked about his attitude towards violence Christian can confidently answer: "I have, ordinarily, no feelings at all about it, because I am merely its photographic chronicler." (43) And later, when Christian is chronicling the activities of the *Black Sunlight* Organisation, he can film an assassination without, at least so he tells himself, considering its actual implications: "[w]hirring the camera, and I had ceased to exist. It stretched me out, laid bare all the basic experiment that was there. . . . A film of blood between the thoughts and the world out there—blotted something out." (84)

The impassivity of the chronicler is an attempt on their part, using the sartorial image of *The Black Insider*, to strip themselves of clothing. Clothing here represents society's repressions which are based around an arbitrary morality and which serve only to make insidious that which they attempt to deny. The chronicler, realising the indefensibility of any moral position, refuses to take such a stance, to dress him/herself in clothes which acquiesce to, support and promote such adornments/stances, and attempts to become like the "naked man," described in *The Black Insider*, who "cannot have any statues but himself." (52) Unfortunately, even if such a position does expose the longed for 'genuine individual' (which is unlikely, perhaps impossible), it still constitutes a stance, a belief which is potentially as contagious as any other. Indeed, it would appear to be impossible to undress oneself of the human condition of 'idea': as we are also told in *The Black Insider*, "[e]ven what we mean is an attitude." (36)

Thus, impassivity is not a non-quality, but rather an attitude, an idea, a belief like any other and, like any other, it transmits itself through its own existence, multiplying, growing and destroying. Witness for instance the quandary in which we find our protagonist in "House of Hunger": "[w]hat began as a little stream of moral experiment has swelled into the huge Victoria Falls of a cancerous growth." (7) It is this realization, also, which Christian refers to when he tells us that "[t]he lethal impassivity of the pen and the camera lens crushed me like an avalanche of rock and ice." (79) It is lethal in the same terms as the metaphoric plague is in Camus's novel *The Plague*. Here the diary-keeping impassive character Tarrou explains that he "like everybody else" (228) has, and has always had, the plague:

For many years I've been ashamed, mortally ashamed, of having been, even with the best intentions, even at many removes, a murderer in my turn. As time went on I merely learned that even those who were better than the rest could not keep themselves nowadays from killing or letting others kill, because such is the logic by which they live; and that we can't stir a finger in this world without the risk of bringing death to somebody. Yes, I've been ashamed ever since; I have realized that we all have plague, and I have lost my peace. And to-day I am still trying to find it; still trying to understand all those others and not to be the mortal enemy of anyone. (234-235)

In response to this revelation of the insurmountable nauseous quagmire in which humanity finds itself, Camus, in his philosophical work *The Rebel*, proposes the following:

I proclaim that I believe in nothing and that everything is absurd, but I cannot doubt the validity of my proclamation and I am compelled to believe, at least, in my own protest. The first, and only, datum that is furnished me, within absurdist experience, is rebellion. . . . Rebellion arises from the spectacle of the irrational coupled with an unjust and incomprehensible condition. (16)

Christian's claim to being merely a photographic chronicler is his rebellion against the absurd demands of society that he adopt a political or ideological viewpoint. He refuses to don such clothing and, as we have seen, despite his awareness of the hypocrisy of his position, he steadfastly maintains it, ultimately believing in his own protest. This is emphasised by the last lines of the novel where he affirms his

position by virtue of nothing more rational than his own existence: “[a]nd the mirror reveals me, a naked and vulnerable fact.” (117)

However, this ultimate faith in oneself is retrospective and tautological, rationalizing existence through existence. Such an affirmation, then, is simply more absurdity and the fact that it is accepted by an exhausted consciousness does not sanctify it above other absurdity. It does not, as Camus claims it does, “reveal the part of man which must always be defended.” (25) On the contrary, it reveals the ludicrous part of humanity which, despite its insistence upon logic, reneges at this critical moment and blissfully accepts the absurd. Perhaps this quality, to be able to accept absurdity, is something admirable; but if that is the case it would surely be more admirable to accept it initially, without having to first struggle futilely to symmetrise asymmetry. Indeed, is not the entire process of such a struggle (such a novel?) ridiculous, absurd and pathetic? As Christian tells us: “[t]hat is the point of these many words. I am as fit to be laughed at as able to laugh. A man may be humble through vain-glory. Fingernails engrained with the dirt of self-abasement.” (115)

Chapter 4

A Nightmare of Ideas (OR: The Great Cunt)

You see things and you think it's you seeing the things but all the time it's the great cunt seeing through you. . . . Everything that sucks you in, draws you in, incorporates you, blinds you, all that consumes you whole. That's the cunt. . . . It's all things to all men, but basically we are it. We are the great cunt.

Dambudzo Marechera (*Black Sunlight*)

'Night is also a sun', and the absence of myth is also a myth: the coldest, the purist, the only true myth.

Georges Bataille (*The Absence of Myth*)

Christian's absurd and irrational faith in himself, his acceptance that he is a "fact," does not simply come about through the intellectual processes we have discussed in the preceding chapter. While he may "reject everything and everybody" and yet at the critical moment not reject himself (an indefensible position as I have suggested) this is only engendered by experiencing in its most extreme the actuality of rejecting everything, including himself, and realising that this actuality is, as I have suggested, also a false totality worthy of rejection. This is not merely a logical realisation then, but arises from an experience of the infinite absurdity involved in constructing patterns of belief or modes of existence from within the perhaps limited scope of the human intellect or imagination. This does not sanctify it in terms of its illogicality, and my comments at the end of the previous chapter remain valid,

but it provides us with a significant insight into the depths to which Christian's mind has travelled in an attempt to encompass the infinite, and ultimately we realise that if this effort is fundamentally useless, which it must be, then any and all efforts must also be. In this sense the acceptance of the self as a "fact" represents not only a triumphant acceptance of the absurd by a mind erstwhile bent on the logical, but a tragic acceptance of the obvious by a mind which has realised its own inability to accept the absurd. That is, the self which Christian accepts as a "fact" is paradoxically twofold; it is a Cartesian or solipsistic self which also acknowledges the unjustifiability of its solipsism, and a philosophically innocent self which simply cannot know anything else. The two feed off each other symbiotically: the latter needs the former to *know* that it cannot know, and the former needs the latter as a model for itself.

The context in which Christian explores the realm of the infinite, only to realise that neither he nor any human being can encompass it, is that of his experiences at Devil's End. Not only is Devil's End the headquarters of the anarchic *Black Sunlight* Organisation, but it is, in keeping with this political identity, an allegorical representation of utter disorder and asymmetry, where no totality can pretend to exist. It is, then, a total inversion of the patriarchal world we have been discussing in the previous chapter. It is the great cunt, a metaphoric antithesis to the great cock, and it is referred to throughout as being an 'inside' opposed to that which is 'outside'. It has become, as Christian's doppelganger tells us, "the rallying point for all those who in any way want to destroy what is out there." (72)

"Out there" refers to the world of structure and concrete belief, the world of false totalities exercising control over human beings at international, national or domestic levels. As we have seen, for Marechera such structures are not limited to merely oppressive political ideologies existing throughout the strata of society, but encompass any belief, idea or way of viewing the world which is taken as being universal and is therefore potentially oppressive. In its ostensible rejection of any such structure of belief or existence, the Black Sunlight Organisation becomes synonymous with total freedom of the mind, body and spirit. Marechera tells us that he based this utopia on his experiences living in the Tolmers Square community in London, which he describes thus:

That was the first time I was living with people for whom there were no

fixed standards, whether moral or political or metaphysical. I still had to learn inside myself the kind of attitude which rejects everything I had been taught in my whole life, an attitude which puts first and foremost the individual human being and disregards anything else.... I was also reading books by writers who had tried ...to get into that subconscious region where a ghost has rights.... And writers like Herman Hesse who try very much to seek alternative ways of seeing, of living, of being, of feeling, of emotion. (Veit-Wild, 1992. 218)

In Devil's End Marechera has created a community which exists on the borderline between the extremities of human communities such as that of Tolmers Square or actual terrorist organisations, and fantastical literary creations such as Pablo's Magic Theatre in Hesse's novel *Steppenwolf*. The former model provides a sense of realism to the BSO and gives the characters a context in which to exist on a non-surrealist level, while the latter provides the total freedom of the imagination and spirit whereby image becomes reality, past becomes present and identity becomes a confused amalgam of partial structures which flow randomly within a destructured consciousness. The two are so entwined within Devil's End that the line between them is eternally blurred and while they provide each other with meaning and context, these meanings and contexts are concomitant in their rendering, breaking down the dichotomy between reality and fantasy.

In this world false totalities are not just the enemy, they are destroyed by their own hubris which denies the necessary partiality of existence. Thus we witness Christian's doppelganger, the photographer who has been soldered to a rock and thereby rendered as physically immobile and concretized as his mask of totality also supposed his identity to be. He becomes trapped by his own mask and to represent this his eyes have become camera lenses, caged eternally within their own self-description. As Chris ominously suggests to Christian: "[p]erhaps he is chronicling now." (56)

It is in this context, as David Buuck has noted, that the self becomes tangled as it recognises that *it* is the seminal force behind its own identity, rather than constructs of totality such as "the photographic chronicler." (Buuck, 1995.) And, as we found in the first chapter, this force is not reliable or consistent; it is a disjointed narrative, a personal mythology which can never be entrapped by the consciousness.

As Marechera has said, "[i]dentity becomes an act of faith, impossible to verify." (Marechera, D. "Soyinka, Dostoyevsky: The Writer on Trial for his Time." 107) In *Black Sunlight* Christian's doppelganger articulates this idea:

Our dreaming and waking life wage against each other a furious battle. Now and then one or the other triumphs but only in a pyrrhic victory. Every instant of our lives is the outcome of that struggle. Yet we retain for years on end the illusion of a linear and easily deciphered life. . . . We spend our lives as life, itself, is coming into being, coming into consciousness, and yet each day we live as though we already *are*, as though we already are conscious of all that consciousness involves. (67)

And in the world of partial images which is Devil's End, Christian's autobiographical narrative becomes taken over by the concomitant dissolving of his own 'identity' into its random and mercurial constituents. The narrative voice moves between first and third person, describing a fluid Christian whose memory, imagination and 'self' become entwined with both each other and with masks of totality which shift constantly and with disconcerting rapidity in a manner similar to that which we have discussed in the previous chapter.

His identity with Chris, rendered by the similarity of their names, is obvious and shall be discussed in more detail later; and we have already witnessed (55) the affinity drawn between Christian the chronicler and Blanche the 'good father', an affinity which is rendered during Christian's experiences at Devil's End. The journalist who appears in Christian's consciousness also wears the mask of the chronicler and is thus identified not only as Christian's twin but also as his nemesis (and vice versa):

'What do you write about?' the journalist asked. I shrank, becoming a gold speck frozen all night in the human fridge. 'You write about Africa?' he insisted. But I grew even smaller and tinier until a blink could have swatted me out of his eye. He rubbed at the irritation with the hard knuckle of his hand. I grinned suddely and turned my back on him. 'Pompous bastard,' he muttered. (75-76)

Christian's indefinable self becomes represented by "the boy" who is recognisably a young Christian but who is discussed in the third person, being an infinite entity beyond conscious capture. The hubris of the 'I', the first person singular, is represented as an oppressive, societal desert-construct which, like the masks which make

it up (in this case, as we have seen, cameras and a typewriter), protects the subject and his/her society from the glare of the unknown, indefatigable predator which is their own infinite self:

There is no soul! The boy once cried but the aunt savagely turned the key that gritted his teeth. A tiny cactus, with bright yellow flowers, sprouted from his navel. *I was the distant speck which suddenly blocks out the sun.* A small noise in Blanche's mousehole. The cats of the house lurked nearby. *Finally the desert drove me out and the last I saw of myself was just before the cats tore him to pieces.* (74-75) [Italics mine]

This mixing of Christian's identity can be further witnessed if we compare the following passages: "I smeared a sample of humanity onto the sheet of glass and inserted it underneath the powerful microscope. What I saw turned my hair white." (74) Followed later by: "I rose from the microscope and the terrible vision the boy had seen." (78) The boy, the unknown third person of self, the journalist and Christian's "I" fight out a battle of identity, each demanding their right to be heard in the autobiographical process, one being the unacknowledged force behind the self, one implicating the self in its own totality, and one struggling to represent itself as a constantly disappearing subject.

There was the same journalist, saying: 'You may be a writer but you are still as coal black as I am.' I smiled down at him a whole sahara of feeling and turned on my heel. But a thorn stuck into his foot. The boy limped heavily and sat on a stone. . . . Life bleeds drop by drop till there is nothing left but a hard gnarled shell. I dug out the thought with a pin. It was as if the world was being dragged tooth and nail out of him. (76)

Later the melding becomes even more obscure, and Christian's hubris of total identity becomes an "itinerant fly" threatened by the predatory urge of the "hungry boy":

In the playground I watched a hungry boy watching an itinerant fly with the interest of a gourmet. *I circled round him once, twice*, and found myself standing before the journalist and looking down at him with sudden interest. 'We were at school together once,' I said. But the journalist curled his lip around the statement and saw the playground and the well-fed boy who watched him secretly. Then he stood up and ignoring my thin proffered

hand stalked away. *The speck that had blocked the sun moved a little and a sudden chink of brightness illuminated my soul.* (77) [Italics mine]

This destruction of the unified self within the context of Devil's End is articulated finally by Christian towards the end of the novel:

And I get the eerie feeling.

Chris.

Christian.

The right people arrived in the wrong bodies. That ought to be me. No—that one. Fucking Christ! Will you shut up! (92)

This breakdown of identity is experienced by Christian because he enters Devil's End as a stranger, a member of the outside—the world of the great cock where totalities are constructed as a matter of course and are not subject to the deconstruction into partial images which apprehends all that is part of this destructured, anarchic world. Indeed, it is important to note that it is Susan who is identified by Chris as the great cunt, telling Christian that he “fell for it just as we all fell for it.” (56) He “fell for it” by having sex with Susan which literally and metaphorically drew him into the great cunt, drew him into Susan's anarchic view of the world, leaving him to experience the disintegration of his own world which this necessitates. Susan tells him that she wants him to “fuck the inside of [his] own ravings” (51) which is, in essence, to undergo the realization in both actual and imagistic terms that the identity which he has constructed for himself is fundamentally perishable. He takes this identity into Devil's End, the great cunt, and what we have witnessed of his breakdown above is the result. Christian is not alone in this fate however; indeed it is the fate of any who enter Devil's End. They must, as their signatures testify (53), in some way or another fuck the inside of their own ravings and confront the destruction of their very identities.

If Chris represents the ‘mind’ of the BSO, then Susan represents its ‘spirit’. She is the ideal representative of this anarchic rejection of the masculine world we looked at in the previous chapter; she has, as we have seen, been the victim of male dominance from particularly her father who, as mentioned earlier (53), articulated perfectly the masculine world's view of women when, after having sex with Susan, he called her a “conniving cunt.” And Susan notes the congruency between her father and Christian, further identifying him with the patriarchal world, when he

tells her to “shut up” after having sex with her. (50) This kind of treatment has not ruined Susan, however, but rather it has endowed her with a healthy contempt for the patriarchal world. It is worthwhile in this context to look again at the peculiar scene early in the novel where we found Christian reading *No Orchids For Miss Blandish* and generally acting, towards Susan, like an archetypal masculine oppressor. Her silent response to his malicious comment is appropriate: “[h]er eyes were hard and small. They could have spat out contempt.” Later we find Susan’s attitudes expressed more clearly when she appropriates a motorcycle for her own use. She is immediately confronted by its owner who tells her: “[t]hat’s my bike, lady.” Susan’s reaction to this, as Christian describes it, conveys precisely her opinion of the patriarchal world she is fighting:

Susan had said nothing. Frozen with contempt. Staring at this specimen, who owned things and too alarmingly, said, ‘That’s my bike, lady.’ Male. Christ.

Before I had registered his first reeling grunt of pain, she had struck him again and again and there he was at her feet, bleeding. Stunned. The shock staring up into her deep black anger. Cracked by her heel backwards, the neck snapping back. The swift maniacal intelligence of her fury engulfed him as though in a sudden blistering typhoon. (102)

This represents Susan’s attitude generally; violence against the world that seeks to oppress her. It seems a mere coincidence almost that it is also the attitude of the BSO; as though the other members of the organisation define themselves in terms of the organisation while Susan defines the organisation in terms of herself. And it is for this reason that Susan is identified as the great cunt: what she is, the BSO is. She is utterly iconoclastic; a complete anarchist. As she tells Christian:

‘All these grand designs. They can be reduced to brief, soon burnt-out cinders. The very sight of a living thing has a similar effect. Smash and pulp it into grains of livid dust.... I think of myself as the sole and significant womb of this tottering nation. And I deal out death, not every nine months but every day, every hour, every instant.... That, if you did not understand is who I am.’ (50–51)

This belief in unequivocal and total destruction recalls the words of Franz Fanon in *Wretched of the Earth*: “this narrow world, strewn with prohibitions, can only

be called in question by absolute violence.” (29) It is a belief in a world without limitations, without restrictions where rebellion and anarchy rule. In the face of the knowledge that any structuring of society leads ultimately to oppression, this is the only intelligent response. It must, as Camus points out, “embrace crime or it is no longer freedom” (Camus, 1971. 36) and it must be utterly rational, accept no limits and be brutally indiscriminating in its *modus operandi*. It is, to quote Camus in *The Rebel* again, “the demand for total freedom and dehumanization coldly planned by the intelligence.” (42)

As Marechera has made clear in an interview with Flora Veit-Wild, Susan does not have any goal in mind other than the destruction she carries out: “the terrorists in *Black Sunlight* are not aiming to create a different society. Destruction is the end. They are not destroying in order to create anything new. Building also means confining people.” (Veit-Wild, 1992. 220) This avoids the “appalling consequences” Camus sees as the result of a rebel forsaking their rebellion and attempting to create. (31) “To be free,” Camus later tells us, elaborating on this point, “is, precisely, to abolish ends.” (64) If there is a goal, a vision to be worked towards, there is, by definition, no freedom. Wilson Harris echoes this when he discusses the post-revolutionary fate of a previously oppressed people: “[i]nstead of freedom, doom presides; it resides in the acceptance of an absolute structure within partial institutions that have masqueraded for centuries as the divine parentage of the modern world.” (17) Such partial institutions include governments (of any form), religions, ideologies or any other systems or beliefs which wears a mask, such as we have discussed, of universality.

Huma Ibrahim is correct in suggesting that Susan destroys the mileage sign (49) because it “threatens to trap her in a milieu not of her own choosing,” but she is mistaken in believing that it “is through what seems like anarchic destruction that she [Susan] hopes to give birth to a new nation.” (Ibrahim, 1990. 87) In fact it simply is anarchic destruction, and Ibrahim’s misapprehension results from her insisting upon categorising all women into a system of feminine resistance which aims to “give birth to a ‘new history’.” (88) In these terms she sees Susan’s destruction as a lead-in to a visionary process which is defined by a certain feminine insight represented by characters such as Marie. Perhaps this seems a valid conclusion given Marechera’s apparently dichotomous view of gender, but it is important to note

that, fundamentally, Marechera sees all humans as trapped within essentially the same dogma of existence. His gender divisions, therefore, are purely metaphorical, representing different attitudes or modes of being which are not fundamental to either gender. As the world which he is criticising is patriarchal, so he defines it, and finds sexual imagery useful in representing it; the antithesis of this therefore, the total reaction against it, is presented by Marechera in feminine terms, these also being conveniently appropriate in symbolic usage. We shall see, however, that there is an implicit criticism of Susan's anarchy in *Black Sunlight* and this criticism brings her into a fundamental relationship with the patriarchy she is fighting. There is perhaps no doubt that Marechera presents such characters as Marie, Immaculate, Patricia (from "House of Hunger") and Helen as existing in an ideal, visionary world. We shall discuss these characters in more depth later, but it is worth pointing out now that the conception of them presented in the novels is not reliable and represents only the protagonists' projection of an ideal. Certainly Marechera suggests that women are capable of certain insight, and Grace from Grimknife Jr's story represents this when Marechera tells us that "she equated being female with being within the inner secrets that all men would never know." (Marechera, 1984. 67) But it is important not to fundamentalise this (as Grace perhaps does), because Marechera sees it operating on the obvious level of the women involved being oppressed; and therefore being more sensitive to the nature of oppression—which does not define it as universal.

In actual fact, Susan is portrayed by Marechera, like so many other characters we have investigated, as wearing a mask of totality. It is the mask of destruction which, while it may not presume to create structures is, by its definition, a structure. As Christian's doppelganger says:

One did not want truths common to all but as it were private absolutes that chiselled one into something brighter and more significant than the design. Like Susan. She can't stand the thought of anything that's comprehensible but has at the same time no relation whatsoever to her and her designs. So she blows things up. (62)

Susan herself articulates her complicity with the world of the masquerade and, indeed, more specifically with the mask of the basic experiment. She feels we should "master our own moods" (93) which reminds us of "divorc[ing] one's feelings from

the object of their attention” and generally calls to mind the construction of a ‘universal’ mask. Susan goes on to describe her destructive tendencies as “like college,” where “[v]andalism is only a first degree. If you graduate with honours you have the opportunity to research further and further.” (94) Thus Susan identifies herself (albeit ironically) with a fundamental representative of the patriarchal world of structures and truths.

Fanon confesses, indeed, that his “absolute violence” is “not a treatise on the universal, but the untidy affirmation of an original idea propounded as an absolute.” (31) He justifies this in terms of decolonisation, sanctifying anything which aids “the national cause” even if this reply to “the living lie of the colonial situation” is in actuality “an equal falsehood.” (39) From his political standpoint this is justifiable, and in psychological terms Fanon reasonably sees violence as important to the decolonising of the mind in that it “enlightens the agent because it indicates to him a means to an end” (68) which means that “[a]t the level of individuals, violence is a cleansing force.” (74) In this sense Susan’s actions are significant for her and perhaps for her country, but Marechera is investigating a more ‘universal’ paradigm in which Susan is implicated merely by virtue of the fact that she believes in what she does, draws significance from what she does, and though what she does may be the purveying of disorder, this in itself is an ideal which, as such, symmetrises the asymmetry it purports to celebrate.

This is the very crux of the paradox which Marechera confronts, and we can see it exemplified in the character of Nicola who is very much Susan’s double. Nicola campaigns “against minds, against all thinking” (92) and, perpetually stoned, “shimmer[s] blindingly against the intellect.” She, like Susan, has been a victim of the oppressive patriarchal world:

The fucking father reaching out, even from the grave, to screw her mind until she went insane. The arse-fucking teachers bludgeoning, raping her mind with facts. Ugly facts. Horseshit matrons who elaborated at length on how they thought she would come to a sticky end. The frightful boyfriends—boyfriends were always frightful—who actually thought they owned you.
(101)

And like Susan her solution is violence, and violence, not as a means to an end, but simply as violence: “[b]efore plunging one’s head into the oven one could at

least blast some of the shit reality out of existence. Not as an answer. There were no answers. But only as a happening. Christ. That stinking intellect.” (101) But the intellect always remains; it is the driving force of cognition, the reason for reason, the constructor of masks, and, as we have seen, the defining feature of Susan’s violence and destruction. This is the same defeating paradox we found in the previous chapter where impassivity was characterised as an active ‘idea’ which thereby contradicts itself. (63)

Thus destructive anarchy, existing purely for its own sake, fails to break out of the trap of the mind’s penchant for totalising. As the revolutionary step between one structure and another it is tempting to see such violence as representing a non-structured midway, an inbetweenness with no inherent nature or defining quality. But immediately it is viewed in this way it becomes defined and becomes structured within its own axioms. The idea is articulated again by Christian’s doppelganger:

You think of making a breakthrough imaginatively and concretely but it’s not the other side you want but the process towards it. That was perhaps your misunderstanding of Susan. She is less and yet more than you supposed.... They look as though they are playing. They do not play. They are really going out there to destroy, to kill. You’ve probably never really destroyed or killed anything in your life—merely wished to, wished to desperately, but never took that irrevocable step. (63)

The moment the irrevocable step is taken, the step is over, and a new pose is assumed. By only carrying out the “process towards” revolution—violence and destruction—Susan looks to be perpetually in the middle of the step; but that in itself then becomes a pose also, and the mid-way becomes an end. And the mid-way to the mid-way likewise, infinitely.

Within the context of Devil’s End Susan’s mask of totality becomes represented as a political system operating under the label of anarchism—anarchism of the mind, body and spirit. Mark Stein has commented insightfully on this, suggesting that within the confines of its own anarchic dogma the BSO has constructed itself as an omnipotent state dictating structures, rules and modes of existence. (Stein, 1995.) This is a correct observation, but it must be borne in mind that these structures are of a nature utterly removed from the structures of the ‘outside’ in that they dictate a precarious existence of anarchy and decay; however, they are structures nonetheless

and they oppress as an inevitable consequence of this. As his doppelganger tells Christian:

It's sordid and squalid here. Sadistic. And yet in such an ephemeral way that it ceases to matter very much. That's what comes of trying to bridge the gap between intelligence and terror. A maelstrom. A whirlpool that sucks you in, and not only involves you but tears inside out the shreds of what humane considerations you started out with. (62)

Anarchy begins as an ideal which frees the individual from the trappings and restrictions of society, which provides them with a logical escape from oppressive forces, but which can lead, ultimately, to a dogma as oppressive as that which it began by rejecting. As Marechera himself has said, "freedom is itself a type of prison, and ... ultimately there's no way out." (Veit-Wild, 1992. 31)

As an allegorical, absurd political hegemony, the 'mind' or 'idea' of the BSO is represented by its masculine figure-head, Chris who, in a very frivolous portrayal by Marechera, comes across as a perverse but recognisable dictatorial archetype. A humorous portrayal of this seems the only option available to Marechera given the surrealist context in which he writes, but the significance is not to be underestimated. The first image we have of Chris is an ideal portrayal of a decadent political, corporate or military leader: "I found Chris dozing with his feet on the desk. He gave a slight start when I entered, and furtively shifted out of sight a pair of women's briefs." And the "heavy strings of shark teeth that dangled down to his navel" identify him imagistically with the chief we met earlier in the novel. (52) The ludicrous scene which follows is testimony to the warped authority which Chris wields: after telling Christian that "[d]isloyalty here is a capital offence" he goes on to inform him that he need not salute because "it's undemocratic and smirks of military totalitarianism." Christian is then informed that tobacco is outlawed in Devil's End; he is introduced to Chris's theory of excrement; and he is adjudged homosexual because of how he strikes a match. (54–55) As a leader Chris strikes us as familiar and ridiculous; his insistence upon dogma is certainly "undemocratic" and "smirks of military totalitarianism" but the nature of this dogma is bizarre and absurd in the extreme. This is fitting with the role of the BSO as a deconstructor of societal norms, and this is rendered further in terms of the reactions to Chris's authority: Christian tells him that he is "full of shit" and Christian's doppelganger

tells him to “fuck off” and then physically assaults him. (56, 61) What we are examining here is Chris acting out the role of the ‘leader’ of a movement which is defined by its lack of definition; thus Chris assumes characteristics of a leader but, along with other expectations we have of societal mores, these characteristics are not only ludicrous but they are also ineffectual. The idea is perhaps conveyed most concisely by Christian’s doppelganger when asked, “[w]hat is the significance of the question ‘How is Susan in bed’?”:

Chris introduced it into the constitution. Of course it is an unwritten constitution. In fact, there is no constitution, just consensus. The trouble is that Chris can be very demoralizing unless he has a role and a routine and a code to operate by. You ignore it at your own peril. (69)

Another aspect, and perhaps the most telling, of Chris’s *modus operandi* is his continual insistence upon being able to see the “other side of the coin,” or the “other side of the question.” This *lietmotif* of ambiguity is what the BSO is about; constantly revising point of view, constantly shifting point of view and acknowledging the validity of any point of view. However, Chris’s continual repetition of this not only reveals it as dogma in itself, but renders it ridiculous and meaningless. Christian articulates this significantly alongside the notion, fundamental to the inherent conflict within anarchism, that to identify it or label it defeats (or at least renders highly ironic) the purpose of a political ideology which rejects labels, structures or concretized identity:

Even the name, BSO was a joke. Bakunin Shits Okay. Bleeding Sods (cf. Orifices). Black Souls Organize. To atrophy ourselves with a BSO label was shit. I had in a moment of drunken empathy with Chris coined the thing about black sunlight and of course he had seen the other side of that blinding light. Not that he did not know whatever other side there was, he said. (104)

We can find a further evidence of the regime at Devil’s End as a political system, operating in parallel to more conventional governmental systems, in the presence of Franz’s brother, a political agitator who hands out pamphlets which urge: “DOWN WITH THE GREAT CUNT!” In the epigraph to this chapter we can see Franz’s brother’s views of the system in which he reluctantly exists. He is an archetypal ‘revolutionary’, a “thin dark-eyed youth” (59) who rebels against his society and sees

it, in a familiar revolutionary vein, as constructing his identity and enforcing upon him and his peers a “prefabricated identity and consciousness.” (Marechera, 1990. 105) He even echoes the more theoretically minded revolutionaries of the ‘outside’ when he claims that: “even now I am what the great cunt wants me to be. A kind of one-slogan agitator whose very obsession is the proof of his tolerated madness.” (70) And he further identifies himself with our image of the outsider on the ‘outside’ when he claims that “[i]t’s people who manufacture all kinds of craziness” (71) which recalls the comment of the narrator of *The Black Insider*: “[i]t is not sanity or insanity that I fear but the power that consciously shapes these in others.” (51) Thus Franz’s brother is brought into an identification with both Marechera and the members of the BSO; Susan, Chris and their peers are, like Franz’s brother, fighting an oppressive system—but the system Franz’s brother is fighting is that which insidiously grows within the ideologies of the BSO. As Christian comments of himself and his revolutionary friends,

Sometimes I think we were the wrong people in the right minds. In the wrong place at the right time.

We were Franz, and his brother. Probably called Fred. (92)

This is the fundamental crisis of any intelligent rebel; they will always be at the wrong time, in the wrong place. Because however sincere their intentions, any action is immediately rendered counter-productive to freedom. “The way to hell paved by good intonations.” (Marechera, 1980. 88)

For Franz’s brother the world of the great cunt is normality and this is why he, the rebel, finds it, the status quo, so repugnant. It would be a mistake to suggest that he covets the great cock because he has no experience of it; he merely wants change, and like so many who do he does not realise how limited are his options. For Christian’s doppelganger, also, this world is his normality, although he does have knowledge of the ‘outside’. He came to Devil’s End, he claims, for the “usual three days” but confesses that quite appropriately “here you know three days can be three minutes, three seconds, three centuries, three millenia, three eternities.” (61) He also tells Christian later that “I have been in this room for as long as I can remember.” (62)

He is very much Christian’s double in terms of their masks of identity; only the doppelganger’s ‘impassivity’ is in relation to the horrors of the ‘inside’ world rather

than its converse. He is merely a chronicler who denies responsibility for that which he documents or for his documentation, and claims that “[t]o evangelize the red-hot magma that bubbles within man is not my purpose in writing. Indeed I have no purpose. I merely see things in a certain way. Just as you see them in another certain way.” (66) Even Christian is moved to recognize their closeness when he asks him what he feels about violence:

At that moment I could feel, could actually see Susan nervously asking me the same question. At the same time my awareness of the room I was in was brilliantly shot through with a dazzling feeling of *déjà vu*. When was it? When? What monstrous time had I encountered all this before? (65)

And the answer he receives to the question of violence is equally reminiscent for us: “[i]t is impossible to ‘feel’ about violence. Impossible to ‘think’ about violence.” This builds upon the image that we already have of the doppelganger as, like Christian, detached from his society; and we recognise his affinity to Christian despite, or because of, the apparent dichotomies of their different worlds: “[t]he thing is never to be taken over by the collective delusion either here or out there. There is complicity in our refusals, too. But that, as Chris would say, does not mean one has not one’s own side.” (62) Christian’s doppelganger is a cynical observer living within the great cunt; he is the ‘equivalent’ of Christian within this unknown world, and Marechera defines him in terms of Christian in order that we conceptualise his rôle.

This version of Christian, living within the unstructured, non-linear and irrational world of Devil’s End, recalls Ivan Karamazov’s “Devil,” his illogical self who visits and mocks Ivan and displays his “stupid and vulgar” thoughts. (Dostoevsky, 1994. 800) This character, who springs up when Ivan tries to rationalise his “virtuous” decision to accept the blame for his father’s murder, represents the strength and indefatigability of irrational desire, wishing to throw Ivan “only a tiny seed of faith, [from which] will grow an oak tree.” (809) Like Christian’s doppelganger, Ivan’s Devil does not live in our reality where “everything is delineated, formulae and geometry exist,” but rather in a universe of “indeterminate equations.” (Dostoevsky, 1994. 801) However, he and Ivan, he claims, share the same fundamental philosophy, which we have also found operating in Christian’s mind: the Cartesian *Je pense donc je suis*. (806) This is the philosophy of the sceptical consciousness which Christian’s doppelganger echoes also: “I am I suppose the sum of all the

thoughts and delusions and feelings which I hold.” But because both Ivan’s Devil and Christian’s doppelganger are confronted by the challenge that they are no more than an illusion, they must also concede that perhaps their identity in fact lies in the perception of them by another. The Devil tells Ivan then that: “[j]udging by the vehemence with which you reject me, I’m sure, nevertheless, that you believe in me.” (809) And his doppelganger informs Christian that: “[i]f I am an illusion, then that is a delusion that is very real indeed.” (68)

Because they are perceived to be, that is, because in someone’s mind they “are very real indeed,” these characters are granted a life and a consciousness which, however illusory, can rationalise itself in the same manner as any other consciousness. This being the case, there is no rationale for denying the validity of one claim to existence and exonerating another. All that is perceived to be conscious is either a delusion or it is not; and there is nothing which can be called upon to judge this for any consciousness. As Christian’s doppelganger tells him:

In a sense I am the fiction I choose to be. At the same time I am the ghoul or the harmless young man others take me for. I am what the rock dropping on my head makes me. I am my lungs breathing. My memory remembering. My desires reaching. My audience reacting with an impatient sneer. I am all those things. Are they illusions? I do not know. And I think that is the point. (68)

“The thing that seems most real,” he goes on to say, “is that we are here and what we do with each other.” But, he confesses, this “[d]ay to day reality ... is itself an illusion created by the mass of our needs, our ideas, our wants. Transform the needs, the ideas, the wants, and at once, as though with a magic wand, you transform the available reality.” This, of course, changes the mask of identity by which the individual defines itself.

We see here then, in Christian’s doppelganger who extends the beliefs of Ivan’s Devil as Christian extends Ivan’s beliefs, the same precarious realisation with which we left Christian at the end of the last chapter. This is a faith in the identity of the ‘self’, based on both Cartesian metaphysics and apparent truth, which acknowledges a fundamental disbelief in both. Not only does this draw the most convincing parallel between the masks of totality operating within both the patriarchal structured world and the eternally deconstructed anarchic world, but it is only through realising this

affinity that Christian is able, as we have seen, to accept his masks. He realises that human identity, even at the greatest extremes of human perception, is impossible to verify and impossible to refute; that the mask is invariably necessary at the level of the individual because there is no other reality to which one can cling.

Chapter 5

What Available Reality?

*Rosewater said an interesting thing to Billy one time about a book that wasn't science fiction. He said that everything there was to know about life was in *The Brothers Karamazov*, by Feodor Dostoevsky. 'But that isn't enough anymore,' said Rosewater.*

Kurt Vonnegut
(*Slaughterhouse-Five*)

*In a cottage in Fife
Lived a man and his wife
Who, believe me, were comical folk;
For to people's surprise,
They both saw with their eyes,
And their tongues moved whenever they spoke.

When they were asleep,
I'm told—that to keep
Their eyes open they could not contrive;
They both walked on their feet,
And 'twas thought what they ate,
Helped, with drinking, to keep them alive.*

(From: *A Book Of Nonsense*)

The allegorical nature of *Black Sunlight*, combined with Marechera's naming the protagonist Christian, recalls John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*, a narrative

which follows the travels of its protagonist, Christian, in his seeking of true Protestant enlightenment in the Celestial City. For Bunyan and his hero, this city, the kingdom of God, represents an actual universal totality; hence we have a fundamental schism between this religious text and Marechera's atheistic novel which denies comprehensively any such totality. Nonetheless, the relationship is significant; if only because Bunyan's definition of his totality is uncompromising and refutes any partial totality (assuming that his is total) masquerading as universal, while Marechera's efforts to assure himself of his metaphysical scepticism are so comprehensive.

Bunyan's Christian, like Marechera's, rejects partial totalities, masking themselves as universal, which he encounters in his journey. Both are searching in essence for the answer to a very simple question: "[w]hat shall I do to be saved?" (Bunyan, 52) For Marechera such salvation cannot lie in religion, but in an escape from the morass of a self-mocking consciousness. Bunyan's hero, on the other hand, has a vision of his salvation and has the advantage of an assurance that at the end of his travels he will find the object of his quest: "an inheritance, uncorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away." (54) Along his way, however, he is tempted by corruptible promises of good which only pretend at indestructibility. These are, significantly, familiar to us in terms of those partial structures which we have already witnessed Marechera pillorying. Mr Worldly-Wiseman, for instance, advises that Christian can relieve himself of his moral burden through the services offered by one Legality and his son Civility who purport to have the "skill to help men off with such burdens as thine are, from their shoulders." (62) Christian is soon to learn, however, that Worldly-Wiseman is flawed in that he "favoureth only the doctrine of this world . . . [and] he loveth that doctrine best, for it saveth him from the cross." And further, that Legality can be of no help to the true christian because "ye cannot be justified by the works of the law; for by the deeds of the law no man living can be rid of his burden." (65-67) Worldly doctrine such as the law is only a partial system which does not impinge upon the universality of God and cannot fundamentally bear upon any human being.

Likewise, ostentatious materialism and societal pretension are also invalid in the soul of the true believer. These are represented in *the Pilgrim's Progress* by Mr By-ends of Fair-speech who uses religion only as it is useful to himself and only as long as it does not demand of him suffering, pain or sacrifice: "I am for religion

in what and so far as the times and my safety will bear it. They [Christian and Hopeful] are for religion, when in rags and contempt, but I am for him when he walks in his golden slippers in the sunshine, and with applause." (151) This kind of expedient attitude towards faith and the practices thereof is repugnant to Bunyan and he aligns it to any such self-serving falsehood: Mr By-ends has three friends-Mr Hold-the-world, Mr Money-love and Mr Save-all-and the four of them learnt their mercenary attitude towards God and the world through the cynical teachings of one Mr Gripe-man:

This schoolmaster taught them the art of getting, either by violence, cozenage, flattery, lying or by putting on a guise of religion, and these four gentlemen had attained much of the art of their master, so that they could each of them have kept such a school themselves. (150)

Most significant perhaps is Bunyan's attack on rhetoric as a mask of totality. This is characterised by the character Talkative whom Christian condemns because "religion hath no place in his heart, or house, or conversation; all he hath lieth in his tongue, and his religion is to make noise therewith." (125) As in Marechera, words are seen for the false totality they are; for Bunyan they mask the non-christian behind a beguiling facade, while for Marechera they are yet another human construct among the many which adopt a veneer of the absolute but which in fact mask nothing: words, for Marechera, "are an empty bag" (117); and for Bunyan the act of "saying," if not accompanied by "doing" (in terms of religious dogma), "is but a dead carcass." (127)

Marechera, of course, has no faith in religion, seeing it as merely another societal construct which controls through a false totality; and Stewart Crehan has noted that in addition to the disillusionment with the church which Christian undergoes early in the novel, when he admits that visiting churches "always ended with the same humiliated ridiculousness of becoming aware that I was staring at a man-made statue expecting a miracle to take place" (29), the BSO attack both Catholic and Protestant institutions, symbolically proclaiming their disgust with *any* organisation or religion (apart, of course, from their own). (Crehan, 1995) This does not, however, deny Bunyan's significance to our investigation, because his belief in the totality of God is axiomatic and does not therefore impinge upon or discredit his attacks on other partial institutions. With Christian's rejection of any human structure, however,

his search is not for the Celestial City but, as we have discussed in the previous two chapters, for the Celestial Self. This, as we have seen, is a fundamentally flawed quest, in that the self is recognised to be of no more possible significance, and be no less arbitrary, than anything else. However, in the context of this realisation Marechera does present us with individuals who are perceived, by the protagonists at least, to be celestial or sublime if only in an individualistic sense; they have achieved, it is suggested, a unity of spirit which can either accept or overcome its 'self-mocking consciousness'.

The first such character we meet in Marechera's œuvre is Immaculate in "House of Hunger." Immaculate, despite the cruel and brutal environment in which she lives, has an inner strength which overcomes her pitiful conditions and allows her to "still dream, still hope, still [see] visions—why!" (17) She is not confined within the bitter cynicism which defines Marechera's other characters (particularly his protagonists), but rather she can ignore, or somehow accept, the vicious 'reality' which perpetuates this negativity among others. As our protagonist says:

It was not possible that a being like her could have been conceived in the grim squalor of our history. She made me want to dream, made me believe in visions, in hope. But the rock and grit of the earth denied this. (12)

Immaculate maintains an affinity to Patricia, who we meet much later in the novella, through their sharing of this prophetic ability to overcome their conditions by way of an indefinable inner strength or inner detachment. The relationship is stated explicitly: "[t]here was a burning in her eyes; a fierce tenderness I had never seen before. No, I had seen it before—in Immaculate." (71)

These characters do not seem to exist in society on the same level as their peers; rather they occupy an obscure universe which is theirs alone and which protects them from the horrors which limit and control others. This does not mean necessarily that their existences are 'objectively' ideal, as Marechera makes clear through the violence Immaculate suffers and the agony Patricia undergoes; but their inexplicable strength, which marks them out from society, or arises because they are already marked out from society, seems to protect them. Patricia particularly is cut off from society in both literal and metaphoric terms. She is "one of those disturbingly concise and adult youths whom our country either breaks or confines in prisons and lunatic asylums." (71) She also ostracizes herself consciously from her white society

through her relationship with the narrator, which is made clear when they are both attacked by right-wing demonstrators. (72-73) And further, she alienates herself from society generally by disappearing and "roaming through Africa with nothing but a cheap camera and pencils and sketchbooks." (71) This process culminates in her losing her voice which, in addition to her club-foot, constructs her out as alien and withdraws her from communication with the world. For the narrator, Patricia is a symbol of an elusive subjectivity which precariously occupies a world of hope and vision, which does not become entangled in that which it despises and which does not fall back on a self-indulgent cynicism which seems to him, generally, the only existence possible. She, like Immaculate, has the fleeting capacity to make him "breathless and full of belief." (71)

Helen, in *The Black Insider*, is another of these blessed women who, through certain physical and psychological idiosyncrasies which alienate them from society, border on becoming Marecherean stock characters. Helen can neither read nor write (26) and she suffers from a mysterious illness which leaves her feeling "[s]ort of subtracted from the world." (50) Again, she has a profound affect on the protagonist: "[f]or the first time in my life I knew I would give myself and give myself unreservedly not to an idea of humanity but to a girl called Helen." (98) Helen is very much a model for Marie of *Black Sunlight*, the two having a literary relationship much like that of Owen and Nick, and they share almost identical speeches about changelings, feeling that "we were all changelings and not exactly what we appear to be.... There's so much missing inside as though something indefinable was taken out of us long ago." (Marechera, 1980. 107; Marechera, 1990. 102)

Marie's abjection from society is represented by her blindness which the younger Christian hated her for because, he felt, it "made her safe from the things I was not safe from." (19) Later, however, he fears that "her blindness was the only thing I loved about her.... that all my feeling for her was bound up with that fragile shell of blindness, that fragile, unseeing self-contained dome." (36) This change in perspective arises from an attempt on Christian's part to vicariously exist through Marie's detachment and to find in himself that which he perceives to be integral to her; her "safety" from the brutal reality he hides from but takes voyeuristic pleasure in: after his and Marie's wedding night, he tells us, "I had begun to fear the bedroom. Fear and long for it to embalm me with blindness. And outside it, *it became the*

camera lens of the photographic chronicler." (47) [Italics mine] Marie possesses a spiritual strength and independence which frees her from the false trappings of a false society. Her intuitive reaction to the church for instance, where she "had taken only a few steps towards the altar when she shivered violently and vomited," (29) gives us an insight into her personal, seemingly unconscious autonomy. Likewise, she does not throw herself into the falsehood of the revolution, but knows that "one day that thin dry branch would crack and send us flying down onto the hard bloodstained ground." (103)

Marie's "self-contained dome" reminds us of Sekoni, from Wole Soyinka's novel *The Interpreters*, and his "universal dome" which as an image of wholeness, his own personal totality, draws no distinctions, dictates no order, constructs no dichotomy. Sekoni is also removed from society by his inhibiting stutter, but his "stuttering explanations" are worth noting:

'T-t-to make such d-d-distinctions [between life and death] disrupts the d-d-dome of c-c-continuity, which is wwww what life is.'

'But are we then,' Egbo continued, 'to continue making advances to the dead? Why should the dead on their part fear to speak to the light?'

'Ththat is why wwe must acc-c-cept the universal d-d-dome, b-b-because ththere is no d-d-d-direction. The b-b-bridge is the d-d-dome of rreligion and b-b-bridges d-d-don't jjjust g-g-go from hhh here to ththere; a bridge also faces backwards.' (9)

He pursues this further later in the novel:

'In the d-d-dome of the cosmos, th-there is com ... plete unity of Llife. Llife is like the g-g-godhead, the p-p-plurality of its mmm manifest ... tations is only an illusion. Th-the g-g-godhead is one. So is life, or d-d-death, b-b-both are c-c-contained in th-the single d-d-dome of ex ... istence ...'

(122)

Sekoni's beliefs, however, despite their seeming capacity for encompassing the infinite, are no more nor less than his own personal perceptions masking themselves as a totality. However enlightened they may seem, they are nothing more than the arbitrary workings of his mind; and the same of course applies to Wilson Harris, Dambudzo Marechera or Ronald Reagan. This is brought home to us in Sekoni's tragic and bathetic fate:

The Dome cracked above Sekoni's short-sighted head one messy night. Too late he saw the insanity of a lorry parked right in his path, a swerve turned into a skid and cruel arabesques of tyres. A futile heap of metal, and Sekoni's body lay surprised across the open door, showers of laminated glass around him, his beard one fastness of blood and wet earth. (155)

The death of Sekoni, it must be noted, is not Sekoni's loss: it is the reader's, the world's; his Dome has cracked, not just moved on. This loss to humanity, in which Sekoni's Dome has fissured and has been revealed to its disciples as only a mask of totality, is represented in the novel by the test of character which the protagonists must now undergo with the supposed god-head, Lazarus, and his Apostle Noah. Sekoni needs to be dead for this encounter; his Dome could not recognise nor tolerate it; but it is his death, in a sense, which demands it.

In this sense we must view Marechera's characters whom we have been discussing. The perceptions we have of their psyches, however convincingly they are presented, are merely the perceptions of the various protagonists who project upon these characters their own conceptions of a subjective ideal; an ideal born of their experiences of the world, not those of whom they purport to describe. They are merely people, with no more fundamental 'insight' than any other people. The fact that they occupy an abjected space in society through a physical or even psychological condition does not place upon them a guarantee of universality; their perception of themselves and their society, while interesting, is simply another perception, like anyone else's. Marechera alerts us to this when he relocates Patricia from "House of Hunger" into *The Black Insider*. In the latter work Patricia appears simply as a woman from the narrator's past with no particular feature; and she has miraculously regained her voice despite the fact that we had been told that "she would never be able to talk again." (Marechera, 1978. 71) She is certainly the same Patricia, however, or at least Marechera is at pains to assure us she is: she reminds the narrator that "you once fought to death a pack of right-wing dogs over my body" and her club foot is still there. (Marechera, 1990. 60)

Likewise, Helen's death (114), which recalls Sekoni's, informs the narrator and the reader of her simple human vulnerability and corporeal actuality. She does not simply die, but her body is mangled and mutilated, and the narrator ends up with his face stuck in the "red spurting wound" which had been her face; an uncompromising

reminder of the ephemerality of any human mind.

This assurance from Marechera that his 'idealised' characters are 'only human' is echoed in *Black Sunlight* when we are told of Marie, when she hides herself from Christian in the darkened bedroom, that "[t]his was her game. This was her own kind of basic experiment"; and that she "was in her own black sunlight." (37) Her basic experiment and her black sunlight may be quite different from that of Stephen, Christian or the BSO; but then she is a different person with a very different view of the world. The significance lies in the fact that ideas such as "the basic experiment" and "black sunlight" are, as we have seen, constructs which represent the rage against false totalities but which, through their own definitions, become false totalities themselves. They are, in fact, symbolic of such well-meaning totalities; the former is analogous to the image of the "chronicler" which we have discussed, and the latter represents the entrapment of anarchism within the false totality of language, as we examined in the previous chapter. Marechera (or Christian) is reminding us that however 'ideal' or 'removed' Marie's 'vision' may seem, or may be represented, she is still entwined within the essential paradox of human existence—the need to define oneself in concretized terms, denying the mercurial collection of impulses which in fact define one.

Indeed, the significance of Marie lies not in her person but in Christian's perception of her—as representing the Celestial Self for which he strives. He characterises this self in terms of Jorge Luis Borges's concept of refuting time:

And I knew then that were I to wake up and find myself at last in that dark rotunda, crucified, dangling from chains and chords fixed to the uppermost sightlessness in her, then—I would be free. Free of the sunlight and the nights, free of all the senses, free of all the thoughts, the visions of a visceral fate. I would have turned the lamp inside out; the lamp which Stephen had grimly turned outside in. That exquisite refutation—how I hoped for it!
(36)

This builds upon what Christian has already expressed of his desire for some impossible personal salvation:

To refute time so fully that I could dangle from white-hot chains fixed to the sky was what always stared me in the eye. To eat and to drink that precious moment of refutation. To prolong it with praises and songs. To

whip its back. To kick it in the teeth. To cherish again and again the bitter reconciliations. The avid embrace of it. (29–30)

Borges's "New Refutation of Time" is a metaphysically frivolous, yet logically valid, work which, extrapolating the idealist theories of Berkeley and Hume, as well as drawing support from certain Eastern philosophies, claims simply that

having denied matter and spirit, which are continuities, and having denied space also, I do not know with what right we shall retain the continuity that is time. Outside of each perception (actual or conjectural) matter does not exist; outside of each mental state the spirit does not exist; nor will time exist outside of each present instant. (183–184)

Idealism of course is significant in terms of what it makes clear regarding perception, not what it says about the things perceived; anything and everything is merely perception according to this tradition, but the fact that they are perceived remains irrefutable and unavoidable; even by the most fundamentalist metaphysicist. Borges is aware that his essay is "anachronous *reductio ad absurdum*" and concludes that:

Our destiny . . . is not horrible because of its unreality; it is horrible because it is irreversible and ironbound. Time is the substance I am made of. Time is a river that carries me away, but I am the river; it is a tiger that mangles me, but I am the tiger; it is a fire that consumes me, but I am the fire. The world, alas, is real; I, alas, am Borges. (187)

This is an acceptance, as we saw in the previous chapter, of 'the obvious', the "thing that seem most real." but what appeals to Christian in Borges's attitude to time is his desire to "reject the whole [in order] to exalt each one of the parts." (186) If one could achieve this one would no longer be plagued by a consciousness of the series of mental states which constitute one's perceived mind, the consciousness which Christian reluctantly, like Borges, accepts. If one could achieve this every exile *would* leave himself or herself behind, in answer to Horace's question. (Marechera, 1980. 116) If one could achieve this one would suffer no accumulation of pain, either physical or psychological, but rather each moment would exist independently as its own autonomous entity. If one could achieve this one would live perpetually in an independent moment, acting spontaneously, unselfconsciously, unpredictably; this would be true anarchism, rather than the absurd neo-fascism which exists at Devil's End.

But one cannot, as Christian has discovered. If, however, one must accept oneself as a 'fact', one perhaps can at least attempt to act according to nature rather than to societal expectation or dogma. As Marechera writes in his oft-quoted poem "The Bar-Stool Edible Worm" (Marechera, 1992. 59):

I am against everything
Against war and those against
War. Against whatever diminishes
Th'individual's blind impulse.

But what diminishes? What is impulse? Who the individual? What is society if not individuals? What is society if not nature? The dialectics abound and, in fact, any answer is as false as any other; to divide individuals into categories based on supposed attention to nature or nurture, when all humans conform in some way to something, when all humans wear, however fleetingly, some mask of totality (fundamentally, themselves), is egregiously illogical. Kurt Vonnegut has apprehended the basic flaw in determining the nature of identity in an appropriately paradoxical phrase: "[w]e are what we pretend to be." (Vonnegut, 1992. vii) It is in this sense that Marechera is ultimately compassionate and empathic towards humanity, realising that if the consciousness is defined concomitant with its coming into being (that essence and existence are simultaneous), then no individual is more culpable, laudable or significant than any other. And this is why Buddy has "been at one with everybody all his life" despite the fact that "everybody" [has] never heard of this." (Marechera, 1984. 54)

In Marechera's later works he becomes increasingly interested in rendering the perspective of different characters, allowing them to express through him their unique individualities. Thus, rather than exploring the very negative 'fact', which we have been discussing, that all people are "[p]recariously doomed. Perpetually primed. And, in that, somewhat erased, leaving only the faint outline of caricatures" (Marechera, 1980. 103) which he does through both argument and exemplification in particularly *The Black Insider* and *Black Sunlight*, Marechera becomes more interested in the nature of the 'fact' of all individuals' existence and how these existences differ. He attempts, then, to explore peoples' dreams, as they are evoked by his character Jane: "[t]he only safety left is your own small dream. Entomb yourself alive in your modest dream—it is the only realisable individuality left."

(Marechera, 1994. 15) We have already looked at some of Marechera's efforts in this regard in his novella "When Rainwords Spit Fire," where he provides concise and compassionate descriptions of a number of different individuals living in a Zimbabwean township. Slipping easily between centres of consciousness, the narrative exposes misunderstandings and misconceptions based, not on any particular ill-will, but simply on conflicting perceptions. We have seen how Joe, the patriarchal figure, is presented with some compassion; but this does not preclude sympathy for his wife or children. We see, in Max and Tsitsi's marriage, an inchoate reflection of Joe and Mother's marriage and note that roles, repugnant to the objective outsider, develop long before they take on the significance of entrenched social values and doctrines: Max is "still full of her enclosing him in a self-satisfied vision of the delights of life" (140) and Tsitsi is not at all aware that she is slipping into an oppressed role:

She did not like the sex much but it seemed to give him great pleasure so she felt she ought to see it through. Now there was a baby coming and she did not know how to deal with it. But, as all the women dealt with it, she felt she would too. (143)

This novella is a triumph of empathy, insight and understanding, examining as it does the peculiar interactions of a number of 'facts' as they strive to comprehend their world.

In the stories which make up the first section of *Scrapiron Blues*, Marechera uses metafictional devices to explore the nature of consciousness. He successfully attempts to create a highly dialogic literary world by allowing the characters he creates (including the implied author and narrator) to act according to their own "free will." This technique is hinted at as early as *The House of Hunger* where in the story "The Transformation of Harry," the narrator is in the bar where the action is taking place, "skulking about with [his] notebook" and "using [his] friends to make up improbable stories." (90-91) A familiar postmodern technique, deconstructing narrative and questioning authorial hegemonies, this is an effective device in Marechera's works through its sparing and ironic usage. For the narrator of these stories, the two most important of his literary creations are Tony and Jane who, he claims, "are the only evidence that I am still alive." (9) Further to this, in the final story, set a year after the others, the narrator, who has just come out of prison, thinks that

"[m]aybe if I find Tonyjane they'll help me." (28) These characters act in two different ways in impinging themselves upon the narrator's consciousness: firstly they represent his conscience as a career-writer-in stories such as "The Shining" which merely records a ribald tale told in a bar, rather than pursuing 'important' literary themes, the narrator gets a "fleeting glimpse" (12) of Tony (a representative of his 'serious' side) as the story comes to an end. Secondly, they represent individuals in their own right; individuals who grapple with personal and philosophical questions, who are controlled by their creator, and who struggle to break free from his hold. For example, in "A Description of the Universe" the narrator explains to a stranger the ins and outs of literature, pontificating wisely on such familiar subjects as plot, character and theme. And he muses to himself: "[w]onder what Tony would think of my description of his precarious universe? It's as good as any other. As amorphous and as inexplicable." (23)

The metafictional neuroses are brought out comprehensively in the story "What Available Reality?" (16–17) where Tony intrudes upon the narrator's dream and accuses him of "making it out like I'm an idiot." The two argue and the narrator is supercilious about Tony's literary pretensions, leaving him ultimately with a feeling of guilt towards his own creation: "you can't go about creating characters as though you were God. You have to give them some latitude, free will. I'm not a fascist, Tony." The narrator also confronts the more dubious side of his own literary inspirations when, after Tony's departure, Jane arrives in his dream and, in a 'typical-male' sexual fantasy, ethereally slips into bed with him. He is forced to ask himself: "[s]hit, what kind of writer was I? Was I seducing Jane? Or was she seducing me? Can a writer, a male writer, create a female character without arousing obscure daemonic forces within his own sexuality?" There is also an ironic comment on literary criticism (pertinent to this thesis), reminding us of Marechera's authorship, and questioning authorial intention generally: the narrator notes of Tony that "[h]is stutter had come out. I had not noticed before. That was interesting. It would perhaps bring in a Freudian significance." The story is drawn to a close by the narrator being awakened by Fred and Jill at his door which brings to his mind the questions (and perhaps the only answer to these) which have been raised: "[t]here was Fred. There was Jill. Who was the reality? Fred and Jill? Or Tony and Jane? Was I myself a character in someone's head? I resolved to get sickeningly

drunk."

The glaring irony of this series of stories, however, comes at the end of "A Description of the Universe" where the narrator proves himself to be utterly fascist in his treatment of his characters. He manages to rid his conscience of Tony and Jane by miraculously turning them into successful middle class bores who are "somewhat pleased with themselves." (26) Thus Tony's desire not to be created as an idiot is fulfilled, but the final joke is on him; he is not an idiot; he is not anything; he is "something in the Ministry of Information. He still doesn't know what exactly but he has an office, a telephone, a secretary and several big ideas."

Marechera uses other techniques to unleash his characters and to bestow upon them interesting and convincing subjectivities. In the examples above this has operated in terms of the characters themselves and we have been alerted to various contradictions in the construction of fiction. But Marechera also gives scope for less discrete characterisation as it occurs within the process of reading, within the reading subject. His dabbling with various literary styles and the uncertain intertextual processes he thereby engenders allow Marechera's characters to move uninhibitedly within the literary tradition, which Marechera has described as "a unique universe that has no internal divisions." (Marechera, "The African Writer's Experience of European Literature." 99) Fred, a character from the stories discussed above, is a Hararean pub figure, an urban raconteur who tells profane tales which entertain his listeners and the reader, and which gleam with literary familiarity. The story he tells in "Smith in Dead Skin," of a wife with two lovers and a jealous husband he owes to Boccaccio and Chaucer, or even to Lucian and Apuleius. This is also the case for his similar tale in "The Shining," and the vulgar account he gives in "Snakes in Tracksuits" belongs to international urban myth.

In "Black Damascus Road" (Marechera, 1994. 123-124) we meet Paul, Saul's converted self who, further down his own road and the road of creation, has lost his faith in a blessed world and a benevolent God. In this story, with its biblical connotations and its comment on the postcolonial psychological condition, Marechera surprises us by adopting a Chanderlesque tone which we can witness in the open paragraph:

The mind of a man who has seen too much too soon. Jagged, sharp, a flinty edge to things. That is how I remember Paul. Perhaps I mean an enduring

simplicity, direct, precise. He came back from the war the way he had gone into it. Without regrets, without questions.... He took off his uniform and put on the dog-eared garb of a librarian—he had been one before the war.... He only drank on Fridays and Saturdays. He got married the day he killed himself.

This tone places Paul within a tradition seemingly alien to his life in Mbare, his involvement in Chimurenga (the liberation war) and his subsequent suicide. Indeed it seems even irreverent of Marechera to treat this subject matter with such frivolity as to place it within a tradition of 'pulp' writing. And yet the story is moving, convincing and resounds with significance. Indeed, the trauma, violence and psychological extremities which are involved in respectable crime writing are not so far removed from what is implicitly involved in Paul's story. The fact that his experiences relate to a specific time and a specific war should not preclude a fictionalising of his story which steps outside the traditions of fiction/documentary or 'serious' psychological investigation. There is also the implication that the style pays tribute to how Paul himself would like to be remembered; not as a sociological document or as a psychological subject, but as a hardened heroic martyr pushed to the edge: the narrator, describing Paul's bookshelf, says "I peer at the titles: detective thrillers, love stories, cowboy tales, war novels. Of the last type there are such titles as *Kamikaze*, *Dreadnought*, *Strike Force Flag*, etc. All bear the signs of having been read again and again."

In "The Skin of Loneliness" (Marechera, 1994. 112–122) Marechera shocks us further by adopting a register typical of a romance novel; but then, this story is a romance. The hero, ludicrously named Heat, is a recognisable Marechera double such as we discussed in the first chapter; he is, however, a thoroughly idealised double. A published writer, teaching in Harare, Heat enjoys a comfortable (if lonely) existence of educated cynicism and vague melancholia. He meets Grace, a veteran of the liberation war, they become involved, she buys him a bookshop, political tension arises between them when she has him "cleared" by "security," but they get over this hurdle and start a life together. Heat displays the Marecherean trademark of being uncomfortable about the implications of sex, and writes "a series of sonnets under the overall title of "The Cemetery of Mind", on the general theme of the demon lover." (122) But Heat is also presented as a masculine ideal; confident,

collected and in control, Grace says to him, “[a]ll I know is you are a good man, though you seem always to be denying that.” (118)

This story could be seen as no more than deluded self-indulgence on Marechera’s part (and a book of such stories certainly would be), but the tone is distinctly ironic and implies merely the potential for character development (in all spectra of the literary world) which exists through the mingling of familiar and unfamiliar, anticipated and unanticipated, indulgent and self-mocking. As a small literary excursion, then, “The Skin of Loneliness” provides an interesting perspective on the theme of Marechera’s fictionalising of his autobiography, and it reminds us, perhaps above all else, not to take too seriously the characters Marechera imbues with aspects of his own identity. Also, the story is not entirely ensconced within the clichés of popular fiction, and Marechera provides fleeting commentary throughout on life in post-independent Zimbabwe, from the overtly political incident with “security,” to this comment on consumer-oriented Harare:

in the smart shop windows, those enticing harlequins, showing perfect legs, perfect faces, perfect busts, and all of the feminine frills planted in pleasantly outlandish settings, each stuck with the price you had to pay to be just like them. (116)

“The Concentration Camp” (157–209), which Marechera never completed, is an experimental narrative which explores various aspects of the psychology of society. Structured as a war story, this piece of writing investigates the Rhodesia of the last years of Chimurenga examining life for residents from many walks of life. Marechera uses a number of different literary genres to influence his style and presents us with prose, poetry and drama. We have already examined for instance his surrealist portrayal of “The City of Anarchists,” actually set in Salisbury, whereby the city is romanticised as a carnivalesque haven of psychological, moral and political anarchy, as the title suggests.

The first of the narratives which make up this novella, “The Camp,” is introduced through a register which evokes the tone of literature written for young children. The narrative is straightforward, direct and ‘easy’, but it is undoubtedly written for adults:

It was hard and harsh, life in the camp. No one had been allowed to bring maize or anything from their village. There was no water nearby; you had

to walk a very long way to get to a river.... Five years old, Rudo Makoni used to walk with her mother to the river.... The guards at the gate had rifles. They were Africans. These guards always searched Rudo's mother very carefully whenever she and Rudo were going or returning from the river. Rudo did not like it because the men would put their hands inside her mother's dress. Though there was nothing she could do, Rudo was learning something important about the world in which she lived. (158)

In terms of what we discussed earlier in this chapter, Marechera is attracted to the child's perception of the world because it is (theoretically) less influenced by the strictures of society; it represents more than anything adult the illusive "individual's blind impulse." This operates, in terms of literature, in two opposing ways. As with the example above, the child's perception can be purely observational, unimpaired by theoretical expectations or tangents. When it comes to presenting atrocities and brutalities, such as abound throughout "The Camp," it is in a sense more effective to present this child-like view because it renders the sheer impact of these cruelties upon an innocent, non-desensitized consciousness. This avoids the cynical invulnerability of the "chronicler" and the tendency to 'analyse' violence in psychological terms, both of which detract from the actuality of the fact. All the readers are left with is the confusion of the child in the face of utterly irrational human impulses; we see these for what they *are*, rather than for what they may or may not represent. Thus we can witness Tony's confusion in Marechera's actual children's story, "Tony and the Rasta":

There is a man who comes to see Tony's aunt. He comes only at night. Tony listens to them whispering and doing things which Tony thinks are dirty. Tony is puzzled because children come into the world through these dirty goings-on. Are children therefore dirty? he asks. But there are no answers. Why do the men not have jobs? he asks himself. Why do all these people live in these horrible houses?

Tony asks himself these things when his aunt beats him up with fists and sticks. Why is she always angry? Why is she like this? Why don't we live in nice houses like the ones I see on the way to school? He asks again and again, but the questions seem too big. The answers are very big. How can a small boy answer them? (Marechera, 1994. 214)

This is what Jane feels when in "Babel" she notes of the school children: "[s]uch vulnerable unsuspecting dreams..." (Marechera, 1994. 15) It is when these unsuspecting dreams have their first sordid encounter with reality that the true impact of that reality is most felt and most misunderstood—or perhaps, as Marechera suggests, best understood.

In addition to this, however, the child's view, whilst perhaps confused, is more adept at appreciating harmless irrationality in a potentially compassionate light. Thus, when we first read, in the short stories we discussed earlier, of Tony's obsession with washing his walls, Marechera momentarily adopts the tone of the children's story, writing short sentences of fact; brief and concise observations:

Tony is trying to wash all the blood from the inside walls of his flat in Montague. He uses a stiff brush, soap and a bucket of water.... He is still trying to wash the gore from his walls. He wears tracksuits everywhere he goes. Bright blue ones. With bright red Bata plimsolls. He coughs a lot, trying to get rid of the tiny red ants he thinks have made a nest in his fragile chest. The ants hurt a lot. (5-6)

In this portrayal Tony is not a mad man or an "idiot" or any other such society-created label (which he also gives himself, as we have seen); indeed, he is merely a man who wears certain clothes, thinks he has ants in his chest and spends his days "scrubbing loyally away at the blood and gore of history." (6) In this way the child's perception projects its "blind impulse" upon the individual whom it observes and the question of motivation, the demand for explanation, and the question of consciousness are not considered relevant; which, as we saw earlier, is the 'correct' response according to Marechera.

This unknowingly humanitarian childish projection applies not just to human absurdity, however, but can also be useful in terms of narrative absurdity, and can therefore provide a perspective from which to appreciate neo-surrealist and anarchic doctrines, so important to Marechera, without the reader being bound up by preconceptions or structural impetus. In Marechera's early works we can find this technique employed in the highly significant story which makes up the second narrative of "The Writer's Grain." This story is again told in the style of a children's narrative and represents an anarchistic indoctrination of a young mind not yet tainted by the strictures of 'reality'. In it we find Andrew, the boy-hero, who

is taken in, after being lost in the woods, by the ominous but delightful Mr Warthog who proceeds to 'teach' Andrew about life. The fact that Andrew cannot remember anything about himself is significant because in this way Marechera presents us not only with a malleable child's mind, but one which has no experience at all upon which to have constructed beliefs or ideas. In this sense Andrew represents a single "moment of consciousness," such as Borges and Christian sought to attain, and is willing to accept anything. This disturbs the reader considerably but, as Mr Warthog asks of Andrew when the latter shies from eating human brains, "I haven't done you any harm so far, have I?" (Marechera, 1978. 119) And Marechera uses this opportunity to comment on society's own ludicrous ideas: "[y]ou must trust me," Mr Warthog said. 'All little boys have to trust their parents' judgement. I did not make it so.'" Andrew is subject, at the hands of Mr Warthog, to a surrealist existence of the most startling nature; and yet this is quite innocent; even charming. Marechera refutes the claims of the panelists on the television, which the dinosaur who holds it before Andrew stole from the new supermarket. The panelists claim that children's literature "contain[s] too much fantasy and too little 'modern' reality." (117) Marechera refutes this implicitly by suggesting through the story the potential for education which a child could receive through fantasy: Mr Warthog teaches Andrew about the relationship between sex and violence (121–122); his "Chart" which contains "all the Story of Man" elucidates clearly what one can expect from the world—a fist between the eyes from General Amin or one of his twins (123); and in a scene evidently derived from Alex's "Reclamation Treatment" in Anthony Burgess's novel *A Clockwork Orange*, Andrew learns in his mind what Alex is forced to learn through his body: his affinity always with Nazi murderers. (125) And most significant to this education is Mr Warthog's "little lecture":

'...to insist upon your right to go off at a tangent. Your right to put the spanner into the works. Your right to refuse to be labelled and to insist on your right to behave like anything other than anyone expects. Your right to simply say no for the pleasure of it. To insist upon your right to confound all who insist on regimenting human impulses according to theories psychological, religious, historical, philosophical, political, etc.... Insist upon your right to insist on the importance, the great importance, of whim. There is no greater pleasure than that derived from throwing or

not throwing the spanner into the works simply on the basis of one's whims
 ...' (122) [Ellipses Marechera's]

This story is an indulgent fantasy for Marechera in that it suggests the lessons Andrew receives are those the author would like to teach his society. The education is essentially an anarchistic one, engendering a mind in which perceptions are not clouded by societal normality and in which there remains scope for the total freedom of the imagination; a mind in which the freedom of the individual is tantamount, but this need not impinge upon other individuals' freedom; a mind which understands the uses and abuses of power, on any level of society; a mind which is always endowed with the knowledge of its own capacity to oppress, not because of its contents, but because it has contents; and a mind with a revulsion for this latter aspect of itself, which it will happily repress, which Alex learns to unhappily repress, at all costs. The subject does not disappear, and it does not lose its freedom; indeed it gains freedom, luminosity and a healthy self-knowledge.

This is a fantasy for Marechera, as I have said, but it allows us a glimpse, not only at his compassion, but also at his personal vision, his own personal totality, by which he grapples with humanity. He represents this vision through a complex mingling of modernist and postmodernist mainstays: blending genres, disrupting time and narrative, allowing the free play of absurd but well-chosen images, and moving unhindered between the macabre and the witty, the doctrinaire and the downright bizarre. It may seem bathetic to conclude with such an early piece of Marechera's fiction, given the wealth of humanist insight we have discovered in his later works; but this prototypical venture into the "unique universe" of literature stands out for its purity and originality, as well as for providing a significant context for what comes later.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

The Marecherean line of argument we have followed is deceptively simple. Having established that the self is unknown, unknowable and therefore beyond capture or control, Marechera rejects belief in absolute knowledge, requiring as it does an act of perception, of anything beyond axiomatic hypotheses. This includes a rejection of all societal constructs be they religious, ideological, political or moral. Such a rejection allows the individual (albeit unknown) a theoretical freedom from the constraints of such constructs. However, the individual must always be conforming to a construct, even if it is solely of their own construction, and is thus unable to ever attain such freedom. This impasse thwarts belief in intellectual or political anarchy (an ideal for the “extreme individualist”) but nonetheless provides the basis for Marechera’s humanist impulse which informs his indiscriminate compassion. If no human being is free from the chains of an arbitrary totality, and if all such totalities are equally false, then no human being is more sanctified in their beliefs than another; this being the case, Marechera espouses unqualified empathy for all members of the species, not through shared experience but through shared entrapment within experience. Right and wrong, good and bad, better and worse; these ideas cease to apply because their bases are mercurial, indefinable and hence unjustifiable.

We have seen how Marechera represents the elusive nature of the self by drawing the reader into a web of identity through the use of familiar motifs and images, many from his own biography, in unfamiliar, continually shifting subjective contexts. This gives the reader a sense of the indefinability of character and fissures their own hubris when it proclaims a knowledge of others. Within the context of these characters

we have also been introduced to the fundamental questions underlying Marechera's investigations. We have found subjects rendered impotent in their search for self-knowledge by the very fact of their intellect; we have found Marechera undercutting fundamental concepts by seducing the reader into making judgements of character only to be forced to radically question these when new evidence arises; and we have found Marechera himself constantly undermining his own position, both as author and as human being.

We have then looked, in this light, at Marechera's more intellectually-based analysis of the elusive nature of the self, and seen how he implicates supposed knowledge of the self along with supposed knowledge of anything, suggesting that the individual's faith in their perception of their own identity is the basis of fundamental belief in any apparent structure: if we stop believing our perceptions, how can we believe what we perceive? Marechera has equated beliefs in such totalities in terms of the patriarchy which constructs orders of existence within the international world we inhabit.

Marechera goes further, however, and, while exemplifying, in a style reminiscent of, but more extreme than, that which we found in the first chapter, the process of utter subjective fission, he suggests that even to comprehend or represent such decay we need nonetheless to construct a totality which represents this. In these terms even anarchic rejection of everything is implicated in the human penchant for totalities. So too are supposed 'visionaries'. So too indeed is everyone.

This being the case, Marechera accepts the necessity of accepting the self and in a sense 'pretending' to believe it is apprehensible and comprehensible; or perhaps 'pretending' to 'pretend' to believe in this fiction. Whatever is the case, Marechera recognises, it is a necessity: a "fact," like the self itself is a "fact." In philosophical terms this is perhaps a frustrating impasse but, as I have suggested, it becomes the axiom for Marechera's insight into humanity; the basis of his art. Rather than wallowing in the "fact" of the unknowable, Marechera celebrates it with a compassion which is at once melancholic and cynical, but also sincere and profound.

Further, Marechera celebrates the textual freedom he finds in his rejection of structures, not through rendering meaninglessness, but through irreverence, innovation, experimentation and subtle fissuring of narrative impetus and expectation.

This is not done in a supercilious manner and Marechera's evocation of his own precarious state is genuinely convincing; leaving the reader happily ensconced within an acceptably amorphous image of the world which movingly weaves an invisible thread through the emotive capabilities of humanity: from outrage to hilarity, from ecstasy to despair, from surreal wit to sad resignation, from contempt to compassion; none of them are 'right', none of them 'true', but all of them, certainly familiar.

Works Cited

- Bunyan, John. *The Pilgrim's Progress*. London: Penguin Books, 1965.
- Burgess, Anthony. *A Clockwork Orange*. Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1972.
- Buuck, David. "The Black Outsider: The Inner Exile of Dambudzo Marechera." Paper given at Marechera Symposium, Harare: Unpublished, 1995.
- Camus, Albert. *The Outsider*. (Trans. Stuart Gilbert.) London: Hamish Hamilton, 1946.
- Camus, Albert. *The Plague*. (Trans. Stuart Gilbert.) London: Hamish Hamilton, 1948.
- Camus, Albert. *The Rebel*. (Trans. Anthony Bower.) Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1971.
- Chase, James Hadley. *No Orchids for Miss Blandish*. Frogmore, St Albans: Panther Books, 1961.
- Chennels, Anthony. "The Instability of the Post-Colonial Text: Marechera's Black Sunlight." Paper given at Marechera Symposium, Harare: Unpublished, 1995.
- Crehan, Stewart. "Marechera, Menippeanism and the Crisis of African Nationalism." Paper given at Marechera Symposium, Harare: Unpublished, 1995.
- Dostoyevsky, Fyodor. *The Double: A Poem of St Petersburg*. (Trans. George Bird.) London: Collins Harvill, 1989.
- Dostoevsky, Fyodor. *The Karamazov Brothers*. (Trans. Ignat Avsey.) Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994.
- Fanon, Franz. *The Wretched of the Earth*. (Trans. Constance Farrington.)

- Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1967.
- Goncharov, Ivan. *Oblomov*. (Trans. David Magarshak.) Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1954.
- Harris, Wilson. *The Womb of Space: The Cross-Cultural Imagination*. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1983.
- Ibrahim, Huma. "The Violated Universe: Neo-Colonial Sexual and Political Consciousness in Dambudzo Marechera." *Research in African Literatures*. 21: 2 1990. 79-90.
- Levin, Melissa and Laurice Taitz. "The Autobiographicalization of Fiction or the Fictionalization of Autobiography: (Re)evaluating the Work of Dambudzo Marechera." Paper given at Marechera Symposium, Harare: Unpublished, 1995.
- Marechera, Dambudzo. *The House of Hunger*. Oxford: Heinemann, 1978.
- Marechera, Dambudzo. *Black Sunlight*. Oxford: Heinemann, 1980.
- Marechera, Dambudzo. *Mindblast: or The Definitive Buddy*. Harare: The College Press, 1984.
- Marechera, Dambudzo. "Soyinka, Dostoyevsky: The Writer on Trial for his Time." *Zambezia*. 14: 2, 1987. 106-111.
- Marechera, Dambudzo. "The African Writer's Experience of European Literature." *Zambezia*. 14: 2, 1987. 99-105
- Marechera, Dambudzo. *The Black Insider*. Harare: Baobab Books, 1990.
- Marechera, Dambudzo. *Cemetery of Mind: Collected Poems of Dambudzo Marechera*. Harare: Baobab Books, 1992.
- Marechera, Dambudzo. *Scrapiron Blues*. Harare: Baobab Books, 1994.
- Rosenthal, Richard. "Dostoevsky's Experiment With Projective Mechanisms and the Theft of Identity in The Double." Rancour-Laferriere, D. (ed.) *Russian Literature and Psychoanalysis*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 1989. 59-87.
- Samupindi, Charles. *Pawns*. Harare: Baobab Books, 1992.
- Style, Colin. "The White man in Black Zimbabwean Literature." *Arial* 16: 3, 1985. 55-64.
- Soyinka, Wole. *The Interpreters*. London: Heinemann, 1970.

- Stein, Mark. "Exploding Dichotomies-A Language Terrorist at Work. Dambudzo Marechera's Black Sunlight." Paper given at Marechera Symposium, Harare: Unpublished, 1995.
- Veit-Wild, Flora. *Dambudzo Marechera: A Source Book on his Life and Work*. London: Hans Zell Publishers, 1992.
- Vonnegut, Kurt. *Mother Night*. London: Vintage, 1992.
- Weldon, Fay. *Darcy's Utopia*. London: William Collins Sons & Co, 1990.
- Zimunya, Musaemura. *Those Years of Drought and Hunger: The Birth of African Fiction in English in Zimbabwe*. Harare: Mambo Press, 1982.